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Te whenua Land

Te ao Māori

The land is not just a physical resource but is Papatūānuku, the Earth Mother, and her descendants, those who embody the mountains, cliffs and soil. In tradition, the first woman was formed by Tāne out of clay; her name was Hineahuone, from whom all people descend.

This represents the direct lineage of tangata to the whenua and the atua. This connection signifies the importance the whenua holds and reinforces the whakapapa responsibility not just to protect, but to restore and enhance the mauri of the whenua. The traditional state of the environment can be described through pūrākau and oral histories; this is known as mātauranga Māori, an intergenerational knowledge system based on observations and ancestral understanding of the world around us.

The whenua of Marlborough provides sustenance, identity and connection. Tangata whenua, as kaitiaki, strive to live in harmony with ngā atua and the elements of which they embody. This is living in tune with nature, not fighting to tame it.

When it comes to the land, the lens through which it is viewed and revered by tangata whenua is an intergenerational one that predates State of the Environment reporting and resource management legislation. Marlborough's unique geological features hold special significance through stones, minerals, cliffs, mountains, and geological activity - all personified as offspring of Papatūānuku.

The Nelson-Marlborough mineral belt, known as Te Rohe Pakohe, was prized for pakohe stone (metasomatized argillite). The significance of pakohe, not only as a resource vital for survival but as a taonga, is exemplified by its traditional trade networks; pakohe from Te Tauihu has been found in the farthest reaches of the country and as far away as Rēkohu, the Chatham Islands. Tangata whenua remain the kaitiaki of these precious taonga.



View towards Acheron Hills and Shingle Peak.

Marlborough's landscape

Marlborough lies in one of New Zealand's most active geological areas, where the Pacific and Australian tectonic plates meet. This constant movement has shaped the district's landscape, creating long mountain ranges, wide river valleys and a deeply indented coastline.

Just as the highest peaks of the Bryant, Richmond and Inland Kaikōura ranges are all formed by faults; so are the sunken river valleys of the Marlborough Sounds. While this geological activity has occurred over millions of years, human activity has taken only a few hundred years to shape much of what we see today in terms of land use and land cover.

Human activities and natural processes influence everything from water quality to soil degradation and erosion. Since 2015, significant land use changes and climate variability have placed increasing pressure on soil health, highlighting the need for careful management and protection of this critical natural resource. In terms of freshwater, some catchments have seen improvements to water quality with mitigation efforts on land, such as fencing to exclude stock, native planting in riparian margins, and more.

Agricultural industries such as viticulture, forestry and dairy are important to the Marlborough economy and to international exports. Sheep farming once dominated the district's pastoral landscape, but today Marlborough's hill country and high country are the primary areas where sheep and beef grazing and forestry continue. In the valleys, viticulture dominates the district's agricultural plantings, with other crops such as fruit and nut orchards contributing to the diversity of the horticultural landscape. While these industries rely on a healthy environment to thrive, they also contribute to environmental pressures.

Council approaches land management in Marlborough as a complex interconnected system, ki uta ki tai, from mountains to the sea. While there are policies and regulations for managing land (including allocation of resources and consenting) under the Resource Management Act (RMA) and Marlborough Environment Plan (MEP), Council has also partnered with the community since the last State of the Environment report through its Catchment Care programme. This voluntary programme relies on community stewardship and proactive participation by landowners, stakeholders and iwi to reduce soil erosion, protect and improve water quality, safeguard sensitive receiving environments and help to protect biodiversity.

Soils deliver essential ecosystem services that make life on Earth possible. They provide rich, biodiverse habitats that sustain a wide range of organisms, from microbes to insects and larger wildlife. Healthy soils play a crucial role in storing carbon, helping to regulate the climate, and act as natural filters, storing, purifying and cycling water and nutrients throughout the environment. Because of these vital functions, healthy soils are fundamental to Marlborough's economy, underpinning the success of agriculture, viticulture and forestry across the district.

Council identifies and targets invasive plants and animals that threaten land use, both introduced to the district and those that arrived by mistake. Biosecurity is important both for native species and to protect local industry, such as targeting Chilean needle grass and nassella tussock that pose a threat to agriculture. Council developed a Biosecurity Strategy in 2017 and a Regional Pest Management Plan (RPMP) in 2018, with an amendment in 2024 to include wilding conifers.

Council will continue to work with the community, industry and other stakeholders to help ensure the land can continue to provide for future generations.



Te whakamahinga whenua
Land use

Land cover and land use are related but different; land cover describes the vegetation present, for instance, pasture or indigenous forest, whereas land use describes the activities on the land, such as dairy, viticulture or forestry.



Viticulture in the Wairau Valley

Land cover is influenced by natural factors such as climate, elevation and geology. Further alterations by human land use often result in dramatic and permanent changes to land cover.

The most dominant land cover in Marlborough is native vegetation, which is a combination of indigenous forest, alpine and sub-alpine vegetation, tussock grasslands, mānuka and kānuka, grey shrublands, flax and fern lands.

Most of this land cover is located at high altitudes and on large areas managed by the Department of Conservation (DOC), which administers 45% of the land in the Marlborough district.

Land cover information is captured on the national Land Cover Database (LCDB), which uses satellite imagery and other tools to create a map. For information more specific to Marlborough, Council carries out field surveys focusing on viticulture and winter grazing.

Ngā meka matua
Key facts

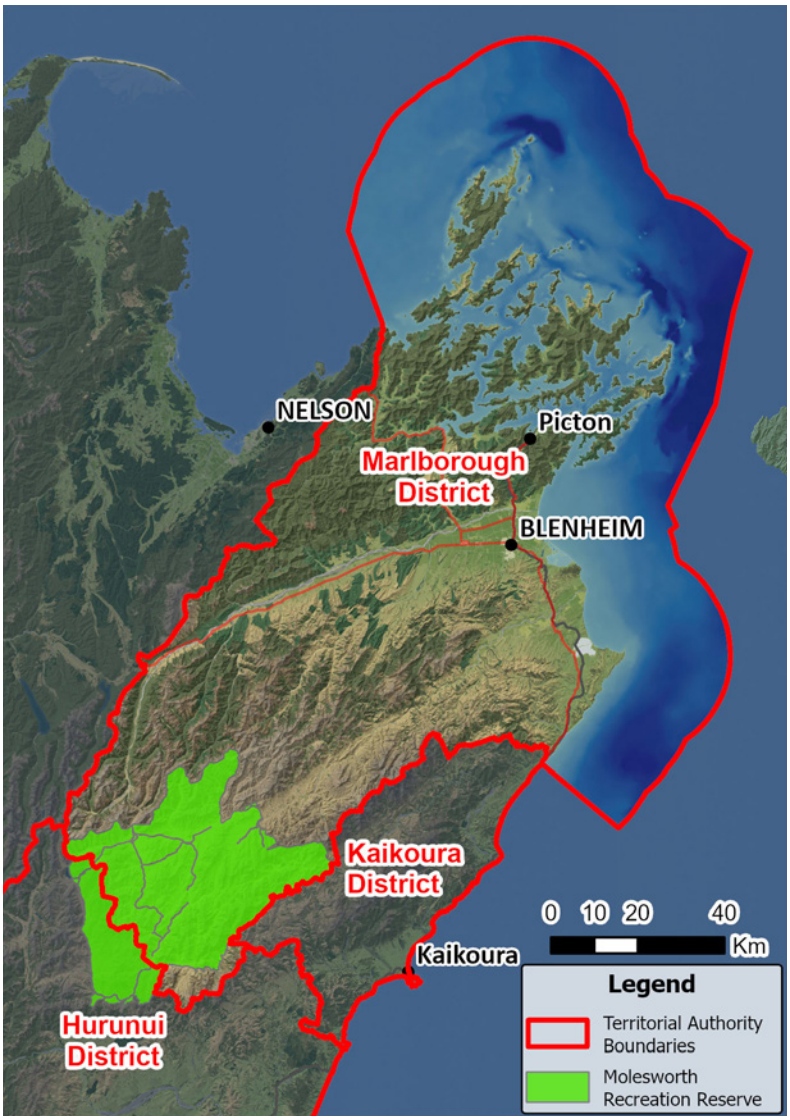
Rangitahi / Molesworth Recreation Reserve

The Rangitahi / Molesworth Recreation Reserve is iconic to Marlborough and New Zealand and is a highly prized area with a significant history of Māori utilisation and pastoral agriculture.

Located in the isolated southeastern inland ranges, the vast landscapes include scree-sloped mountains, wide river flats and exposed tussock slopes. The reserve supports a range of activities, including public recreation and high country farming, as well as serving ecological and scientific functions.

The farm is New Zealand's largest high-country farm and spans more than 180,000 ha, supporting the country's largest herd of cattle at around 10,000. It operates under a Crown pastoral lease, known as "Molesworth Station". Ownership of the land rests with DOC. The existing pastoral lease has expired, and the property's lease was tendered by DOC in 2025.

The grant of a new lease will continue the historic legacy of pastoral farming but with an increasing emphasis on ecological, recreational and cultural values.



Rangitahi / Molesworth is a place of constant change, a wild and untamed place that is facing new pressures, such as wilding conifers infestation.

Wilding conifers are a biodiversity and biosecurity threat, and Council, iwi and community trusts are working together to ensure the area thrives for future generations.

New developments in geospatial mapping technology enable better mapping of land cover and land use. Council anticipates these developments will lead to more accurate and frequent reporting on land use change.

Economic growth is the biggest driver of changes in land cover and land use. As markets shift, landowners often change their land use to gain higher returns from their property. In Marlborough, this has been particularly prevalent, with a shift from pastoral farming and arable cropping to viticulture and forestry over the past 30 years. The largest change in land cover since 2015 is the annual harvesting of around 2,500ha of forest.

Good information about changes in land cover and land use provides insight into pressures on the environment, including impacts on water quality, soil health and erosion.

Pastoral farming

Livestock farming has deep historical roots in Marlborough and continues to play an important role in the district's rural economy. Sheep farming once dominated Marlborough's pastoral landscape. Today, livestock farming remains present, largely in Marlborough's hill country and high country areas, where beef grazing continues.
The most iconic example is Rangitahi / Molesworth Recreation Reserve.

The spread of vineyards has reduced the overall area devoted to livestock farming, and though sheep and beef operations continue to form a significant part of Marlborough's agricultural mix, many remaining farms operate mixed systems that integrate livestock with crops, vineyards or pasture seed production, reflecting both the district's traditional farming base and the need to adapt to changing land use pressures.

Dairy farming plays a modest but important role in Marlborough's agricultural landscape, predominantly in areas north of the Wairau River in Rai Valley, Te Hoiere / Pelorus, Linkwater and Kaituna / Tuamarina. The district's 38 dairy farms are characterised by relatively small herd sizes and may have mixed land uses. For example, the recent report: Freshwater Management and Marlborough's Economy cited 8% of total farmland is in forestry, with some having up to 25% in native bush.

Arable farming now occupies a smaller footprint compared with the district's dominant viticulture sector. Historically, Marlborough's low-lying plains supported a mix of cereal and seed crops alongside livestock farming.
These crops were typically grown in rotation with pasture, reflecting the mixed-farming systems common before the widespread conversion of farmland to vineyards beginning in the 1970s. That expansion has continued since 2015 albeit at a slower pace. Approximately 8,000 hectares have been converted to vineyards since that time.



Arable farming in the lower Awatere Valley

Viticulture and horticulture

Marlborough's wine industry has grown remarkably from its modest beginnings in the 1970s to become New Zealand's most prominent wine-producing region and a global benchmark for Sauvignon Blanc. The first commercial vines were planted on the Wairau Plains in 1973, at a time when few believed Marlborough's cool climate and dry conditions could sustain a successful viticultural industry. By the early 1980s, however, the district began attracting international interest as its Sauvignon Blanc captured global attention. Over subsequent decades, the district has continued to refine its viticultural practices, expand into areas such as the Awatere and Southern Valleys, and build a strong reputation for quality and innovation.

Today, Marlborough stands at the heart of New Zealand's wine sector as a globally recognised leader in cool-climate wine production, with Sauvignon Blanc remaining its signature and most influential varietal. Marlborough accounts for nearly 70% of New Zealand's total vineyard area and wine production.

In 2023 an Agrilink report notes there were 47 wineries operating in Marlborough (up from 33 in 2015). Grape production has risen by 26% since 2015 with 410,291 tonnes harvested in 2025 - the largest in the district's history, and a 31% increase from 2024. This expansion brings environmental challenges for managing winery waste, including wastewater and grape marc (solids leftover from grapes after they've been pressed consisting of skins, seeds, pulp and stems).

Marlborough's horticulture sector includes apples, cherries, blueberries, berry fruit, figs, feijoas, and a variety of fruit and nut trees. While viticulture dominates the district, these orchards contribute to the diversity of the horticultural landscape.

Marlborough is also home to New Zealand's largest pinenut industry, which cultivates Mediterranean stone pine across orchards in the Wairau Valley and East Coast area.



Viticulture in the Awatere Valley



Deep-water log export facility in Shakespeare Bay, Picton. Credit: Jim Tannock Photography

Forestry

Forestry is a long-established and important industry in Marlborough, with approximately 8% of the district's land (91,000 ha) planted in exotic plantation forests dominated by radiata pine, alongside smaller areas of eucalyptus and macrocarpa. These forests support a significant local silviculture and wood processing sector, including the sawmill at Kaituna and the Picton deep-water log export facility. Marlborough is also an innovator for durable eucalypt forestry, with research showing potential for a new hardwood industry producing vineyard posts and biofuel, improving land use resilience on dryland farms.

Marlborough's forestry sector consists predominantly of commercial plantation forestry mostly located in the Wairau, Te Hoiere / Pelorus and Marlborough Sounds and to a lesser extent farm forestry. However, just over 50% of the forestry estate is in small-scale ownership where there is a tendency towards smaller plantations which has implications for harvesting and the flow on to associated economic activities.

Pressures

Human land use activities have resulted in increased pressure on natural systems and ecosystem services.

Council monitoring programmes have highlighted several issues including declines in soil quality, increased contamination and erosion of soil, loss of nutrients and sediment into water as well as elevated pest and weed pressures. Council has also identified other issues driven by increased land use pressures such as increased demand for irrigation water, diversion and removal of waterways, destruction of soils due to recontouring of land, the removal of shelterbelts and trees, hillslope erosion and increased sediment loss to waterways and a reduction in the amount of water available in some catchments.

Pressures on soils

Soils deliver essential ecosystem services that make life on Earth possible. They support plant growth for food, fibre and fuel production as well as providing rich, biodiverse habitats that sustain a wide range of organisms, from microbes to insects and larger wildlife. Healthy soils play a crucial role in storing carbon, helping to regulate the climate, and act as natural filters, storing, purifying, and cycling water and nutrients throughout the environment. Because of these vital functions, healthy soils are fundamental to Marlborough's economy, underpinning the success of agriculture, viticulture, and forestry across the district.

Soil compaction issues result from a range of land uses and have been observed in 48% of all soil monitoring samples across Marlborough. Compaction can slow plant growth and increase the rate of water and nutrient runoff into waterways. This runoff can raise nitrate and phosphorus levels in waterways, increase flood flows, promote algal blooms, and harm aquatic ecosystems and biodiversity.

The use of heavy machinery between rows in vineyards results in compaction, mostly in vehicle wheel tracks, reducing both large and small pore sizes in the soil. Vineyard development (and increasingly redevelopment) can also be a highly disturbing process for soils. Typically, extensive cultivation occurs, sometimes including rock crushing at the site, which can significantly reduce soil carbon and be destructive for soil structure and biodiversity. While soils can recover over time from this process, recontouring to increase plantable area can result in more permanent changes to soil chemistry and hydrology, for example through severe top- and sub-soil mixing. Some re-contoured areas are showing signs of poor productivity.

Livestock treading under intensive dairy farming causes less severe but more widespread compaction. This tends to impact only large pores in the soil. Soil monitoring shows compaction in 80% of all dairy sites sampled, likely caused by stock treading on wet soils.

Arable farming also contributes to compaction through tillage, heavy machinery and cultivation on vulnerable soils. This can also exacerbate erosion, decline in organic matter, and sediment loss.

Soil carbon loss is a significant concern in viticulture and cropping. In cropping, repeated cultivation has driven rapid and severe carbon loss. Use of herbicides under vines has reduced weed growth and restricted carbon inputs resulting in slower, but still significant, carbon declines in viticulture. Loss of carbon results in productivity declines from reduced water and nutrient storage, large discharges of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere, and declines in soil structure and biodiversity which can worsen compaction.

Discharges to land

District-wide assessments show increasing concerns about nutrient loss from soil to water. Nutrient inputs risk leaching during high rainfall events. This is being exacerbated by greater flood vulnerability under changing climate conditions.

Use of fertiliser can lead to increased cycling of nutrients and trace element accumulation in soils. Land uses that apply large amounts of fertiliser, like intensive livestock farming, show elevated levels of nitrogen and phosphorus. Good farming practice can minimise the risk of loss of these to waterways where they can become water pollutants. Large and regular applications of phosphate fertilisers can cause accumulations of toxic cadmium and fluoride derived as contaminants from the fertiliser.

Grape marc generates leachate with high nutrient levels, which must be managed appropriately to ensure the contaminants it contains do not degrade soil, pasture and water quality. Grape marc is primarily disposed of by spreading it on land, enabling the recycling of organic material and nutrients to land. Other methods include stock feed or composting. With increasing production volumes, there is growing pressure to adopt more value-added alternatives like drying, energy generation, or biochar production to reduce environmental impact and create economic benefits.

Winery wastewater from grape processing and cleaning operations creates significant disposal demands. The volume of water used in Marlborough wineries varies each harvest season. In 2023, total use was over 730,000 m^3 and the majority of water used is disposed of as waste.

Currently, 39 wineries discharge wastewater to land, 21 under Permitted Activity Standards in the MEP and 18 under resource consents. Although many of these discharges occur under Permitted Activity rules, discharges are not without challenges, such as accumulation of contaminants, leaching losses of nutrients to groundwater and risks of damage to soil structure if not properly performed.

Wineries located in the Riverlands and Cloudy Bay industrial zones discharge directly to the trade waste system. The seasonal surge of winery waste during vintage can place strain on Blenheim's sewage treatment plant, which also handles other industrial trade waste. Additionally, one of the main issues are spills, either on-site or during transport.

Climate and erosion

More frequent heavy rainfall and flooding events have caused damage to farm infrastructure, reducing pasture quality, causing stream bank erosion and increasing the likelihood of contaminants and sedimentation entering waterways.

Severe weather events can also expose vulnerable forestry harvest sites, increasing the risk of long-term environmental degradation.

Around 37% of the district's exotic forest land cover classified as high erosion risk and 17% as moderate erosion risk (Figure 1). Forestry operations, particularly on steep terrain, are vulnerable to soil loss, sedimentation, and downstream impacts on water quality and aquatic ecosystems.

The effects are intensified during and after harvesting, when the production of woody debris and soil disturbance increases. Poorly built stream crossings, inadequate slash control and insufficient stabilisation to reduce erosion following harvest can also lead to sedimentation and habitat disruption.

Stabilisation actions include maintaining water controls, encouraging revegetation and managing exposed soils. As forestry is expected to play a growing role in carbon sequestration under New Zealand's Emissions Reduction Plan, there is growing emphasis on locating and managing forests to protect biodiversity, soil health and freshwater ecosystems.

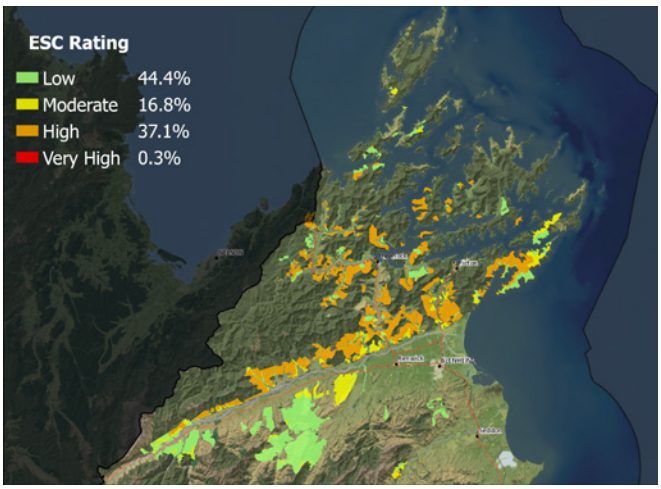


Figure 1: Marlborough exotic forest erosion susceptibility classification

In Marlborough, where much of the land is steep and prone to erosion, balancing production forestry with environmental protection remains a critical and ongoing challenge.

Ngā meka matua
Key facts

HAIL and Contaminated Land

The Hazardous Activities and Industries List (HAIL) is a list of 53 activities and industries that are more likely to have used, stored or disposed of hazardous substances, which means there is a greater probability of the land being contaminated.

Land identified as HAIL does not mean the land is contaminated; it only indicates a potential for contamination. Conversely, an activity or industry that does not appear on the list does not guarantee a site will not be contaminated. The only way to know if contamination has occurred is to test the soil.

HAIL is a tool Council uses to identify land for inclusion on Council's land-use register. Being on the register means further investigation may be required if certain types of work are planned on that land. This results from requirements under the Resource Management (National Environmental Standard for Assessing and Managing Contaminants in Soil to Protect Human Health) Regulations 2011 (NESCS). These were put in place to ensure that land is suitable for the use and activities carried out on it, providing a level of health protection.

The NESCS requires a contaminated land assessment to be undertaken if activities such as excavation, subdivision or changing the use of the land are planned. Depending on the proposed work and the levels of any contaminants on the site, a resource consent may be required, which could include remediation. If successful remediation of land occurs, the HAIL classification is not removed as history cannot be changed, but the land register classification is updated to reflect the suitability of use and level of remediation.

Contaminated land from historical uses

Contaminated land from past industrial, agricultural, and commercial activities is part of Marlborough's waste legacy. Common examples include old fuel storage areas, timber treatment sites, sheep dips, orchards, and market gardens. If contamination is not identified and managed, it can affect the safe use of land, water quality, and community wellbeing. The desired outcome is that land in Marlborough is safe and suitable for its current and future uses. Historic land uses continue to create challenges for land development and subdivision.

More information about historic activities has become available, and development pressures mean more sites are being investigated. This has led to a growing number of properties being identified as potentially contaminated.

Pest species

Marlborough has a long history of the introduction of pest species. Some of these plants and animals were originally introduced to the district intentionally. Conifer trees were predominantly planted for erosion control and later spread extensively. Other species arrived by accident, like Woolly Nightshade, which hitchhiked into the country on contaminated goods. Some pests have escaped from people's gardens and spread into the wild. Moth plant is a good example, because it was first grown as an ornamental vine but now grows in many places across Marlborough, where it climbs over native plants and smothers them. These invasive species can outcompete native plants and animals change habitats making it harder for local ecosystems to survive.

Well-established invasive agricultural weeds, such as Chilean needle grass and nassella tussock, continue to be a significant issue for the agriculture sector in Marlborough, with impacts on production, animal health and the economy. Other highly invasive agricultural plants including saffron thistle and cathedral bells are also managed. African Lovegrass was also recently detected near the Waimā River bridge in South Marlborough. There are several pest plant species that are ecological threats and widespread in distribution (like Old Man's Beard and Banana Passionfruit.) Some of these species are difficult to manage and require site level interventions or biological control techniques.

The district's biggest plant threat comes from wilding conifers, particularly in South Marlborough and the Marlborough Sounds. They spread rapidly and can significantly impact the district's economy, water resources, iconic landscapes, and biodiversity. Council collaborates with Biosecurity NZ, DOC, and various community groups to manage wilding conifers in key locations.

Wild ungulates such as goats, deer and pigs have had a significant impact on land stability and erosion across Marlborough. Browsing and trampling reduce protective vegetation cover, particularly on steep, erosion prone slopes. The loss of understorey plants and ground cover exposes soils to rainfall impact and surface runoff, causing slope instability and increasing sediment inputs into streams and waterways.

Response

Council maintains comprehensive monitoring programmes in land use, soil quality, contaminated land management and biosecurity programmes.

It also monitors compliance of discharges to land and water. Council uses a risk-based approach to prioritise compliance work, with dairy farming, winery operations, and forestry a high priority.

Land use

Council carries out regular desktop studies and field work to keep track of main land use changes, with vineyards and winter grazing mapped each year. These studies draw on all available resources including LCDB, satellite imagery and observations made by Council staff in the course of their work. Forestry mapping is now carried out by other agencies using satellite imagery and is available online.

Soil monitoring programme

Council has a comprehensive soil quality monitoring programme to measure the health of this precious resource.

Mapping and characterisation

Updating the existing soil maps for the district, largely drawn prior to the 1960s is underway. Council's soil mapping project seeks to improve both soil maps and the underlying soil attribute data shown in those maps. Mapped soil data has a number of uses, including via the online IrriCalc calculator that is used to allocate irrigation water. Future uses of the mapped soil data will include evaluating nutrient management on farms, farm planning and improving understanding of the suitability of sites for different farming activities. It also provides a resource that landowners can use to assist their own management. As land use and irrigation demand change, and expectations for improved freshwater quality continue to rise, councils and land managers need reliable data to understand how soils are changing over time and how they respond to different farming practices. Soil data is available via the national soil map portal S-Map.

Soil quality monitoring

A soil quality monitoring programme is essential for monitoring the state of the soil resource. The current monitoring provides the evidence required to detect degradation early including declining soil structure, erosion risk, nutrient imbalances or loss of organic matter. It also helps evaluate whether land use changes, on-farm mitigation and regulatory measures are improving soil health.

Monitored sites are located throughout the district to cover representative combinations of soil orders and land uses. The monitoring programme has expanded from 96 to 104 sites since 2015, with plans for 123 sites in total. Nine parameters are monitored to provide a wide-ranging assessment of soil quality. The Hot Water Carbon (HWC) parameter was introduced to the monitoring programme in 2019 as a key indicator of microbial activity and soil carbon quality.



Soil monitoring in progress

Soil health workshops

In 2022, in response to issues identified by the soil quality monitoring programme, Council commenced a series of soil health workshops. These are held on farms and facilitated by Landcare Trust. A typical workshop involves digging soil pits and discussing the findings with attendees. An independent agronomist provides training and advice to participants. To date, approximately 100 people have attended five workshops across the district.

Contaminated land programme

Council is responsible for identifying both historical and current activities that have the potential to result in land contamination, which are detailed in the Ministry for the Environment's (MfE) HAIL list. Landowners must assess their property when certain activities are proposed, such as subdivision or earthworks, to ensure any potential or actual contamination is identified and managed. Council also maintains a Listed Land Use Register (LLUR) to record sites with a history of potentially contaminating activities under the HAIL list.

Council manages contaminated land through the NESCS and the MEP. The legislation requires the identification and management of contaminated land.

Biosecurity and pest species programme

Council has been managing pest species for some time, with a significant focus on the primary sector, particularly pastoral farming. Councils have been mandated to provide regional leadership in biosecurity and pest management through programmes that benefit both the economy and the environment. Collaboration has also been effective, with partnerships with DOC, the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI), and the community established on several biosecurity programmes highlighting the value of collaboration.

Council developed a Biosecurity Strategy in 2017 and a Regional Pest Management Plan (RPMP) in 2018, to give effect to the Biosecurity Act, with an amendment in 2024 to include wilding conifers. The RPMP establishes rules for managing particular pests. These programmes are predominantly for invasive species that are at low incidence or abundance but have the potential to be a significant threat (or are threatening to reach Marlborough).

Council is monitoring and, in some cases, undertaking initial control of several emerging threats with some of these invasive plants likely to be included in the next RPMP.

Other programmes provide regulatory support to protect an immense investment that has been, and continues to be, made by the community. Council also employs a non-regulatory approach centred on community engagement, citizen science, education and awareness. Surveillance and monitoring detect new threats early.

Pastoral farming

Since 2015, Central Government has progressively introduced mandatory stock exclusion requirements. The Resource Management (Stock Exclusion) Regulations 2020 require dairy cattle, pigs and intensively grazed beef cattle and deer to be excluded from rivers, lakes, and wetlands to reduce sediment, nutrient runoff, and *E. coli* contamination in response to declining freshwater health. Amendments to these regulations came into effect in 2024.

Nutrient pressures have also led to new national reporting requirements. Under the National Environmental Standards for Freshwater (NESFW), dairy farms with more than 20 ha of milking platform must report annual synthetic nitrogen use. This reporting aims to improve accountability and reduce nitrogen losses to water as water quality pressures increase.

Council monitors dairy effluent and nutrient use, administers the Stock Exclusion Regulations and NESFW nitrogen-limit reporting requirements, and undertakes annual Dairy Effluent Surveys. These activities help ensure compliance with environmental standards and promote best practice.

Effluent discharge is permitted under the Marlborough Environment Plan only where strict conditions are met, including preventing runoff to waterways and maintaining adequate buffers and storage. Where these standards cannot be met, resource consents with stricter controls are required.

Council collaborates with landowners on projects such as its Catchment Care programmes which support farmers with non-regulatory tools including improved nutrient management, riparian planting, and farm planning to address diffuse pollution from intensive land uses. Actions like fencing waterways reduce nutrient and sediment pressures by allowing vegetation to establish, filter runoff, stabilise streambanks, and improve aquatic habitat.

Monitoring under Te Hoiere Project has already shown reductions in nitrate, ammoniacal nitrogen, and phosphorus where fencing, planting, and improved land management have been implemented, demonstrating the effectiveness of these responses.

The Hill Country Erosion Programme is another joint effort. This Government and Council-funded initiative is a partnership with MPI, regional councils and landowners to combat soil erosion on vulnerable farmland by planting trees and implementing sustainable land management.

Horticulture and viticulture sector

Each year during vintage operations, wineries that discharge winery waste are assessed for compliance with resource consent conditions or permitted activity rules in the MEP. Monitoring focuses on discharge volumes, storage practices, and potential environmental risks such as ponding or contamination of waterways. Wineries also provide sampling and reporting data, which Council reviews to confirm that wastewater application does not harm soil health or water quality. This process helps maintain sustainable wine production while protecting Marlborough's natural resources.

Council publishes annual monitoring reports, wastewater and grape marc monitoring snapshots and reports that highlight common issues and best-practice expectations, along with technical guidelines for wastewater and marc management. Pre-harvest workshops provide timely reminders of rules and best-practice management before wastewater volumes peak, while postharvest sessions reinforce learnings and support continuous improvement.

Council also collaborates with Wine Marlborough and the Circular Wine Group and participates in industry briefing sessions that share solutions and emerging technologies.

Winery wastewater

Most wineries discharging wastewater to land have designated discharge fields, with some removing vines to create a more easily managed disposal option. High-rise sprinkler systems are also being used to promote evaporation and even wastewater distribution. This approach also reduces soil compaction by limiting vehicle movements across the field.

Some wineries operate under resource consents that allow wastewater discharge within floodway zones, which requires careful management given the proximity to river channels. These areas often have highly permeable soils, increasing the risk of leaching into groundwater and nearby streams and rivers.

Grape marc

Currently, one winery holds a resource consent for composting, 29 wineries operate under the MEP for application to land and production of compost, and 11 wineries reported sending grape marc out of the district for stock feed. Some wineries undertake both activities.

The industry has invested in trials and new initiatives to find a sustainable solution for disposing of grape marc. The Marlborough Circular Wine Group has a goal to implement a long-term sustainable solution for storing and processing grape marc. A number of trials are underway, including Biochar, drying and ensilage for stock feed.

Forestry activity

Over the past ten years, forestry in New Zealand has seen notable changes driven by national regulations. The introduction of the National Environmental Standards for Commercial Forestry (NESCF) has unified forestry-related rules across regions. While this has reduced variability in regulatory approaches, it has also lowered the need for resource consents in some areas. Despite these changes, environmental incidents continue to occur, illustrating that consistency in rules alone has not been sufficient to prevent adverse outcomes.

Council's forestry compliance monitoring programme combines aerial and ground-based inspections to achieve broad and detailed coverage. Drone technology enables cost-effective assessment of stream crossings, waterways, and infrastructure.

Monitoring is supported by a scaled enforcement approach and follows the '4E' approach:

- Engaging with the industry through site visits and meetings
- Educating operators before and during activities
- Enabling good environmental outcomes by promoting best practice
- Enforcing rules with responses scaled to the level of non-compliance

The forestry industry works collaboratively with Council on initiatives aimed at improving practice and reducing environmental risk. These initiatives utilise the latest developments in land and forestry science and support more consistent and constructive engagement.

A Window of Vulnerability inspection programme is a recent development which involves targeted monitoring of forestry blocks during the critical post-harvest period (years 2–6) when the land is most susceptible to erosion and slash movement.

In sensitive coastal areas, the Council requires resource consents for forestry activities to ensure site-specific environmental risks are properly managed. Unique conditions exist for forestry in the Marlborough Sounds due to the area's steep and erodible land. The MEP applies greater stringency for plantation forestry in the Marlborough Sounds than is required by NESCF due to the risk of erosion and consequent downslope sedimentation which can degrade freshwater and marine ecosystems. Wider coastal setbacks are required, with planting, harvesting, and earthworks prohibited within 200 m of the coastal marine area.

Through Te Hoiere project, the Top of the South Wood Council has embarked on five forestry innovation projects to improve outcomes for industry and the environment in the catchment (Refer to Te Hoiere Project case study on page 103 for more information).

Since the 2015 State of the Environment report, Council has worked to build stronger data on the biophysical environment in which forestry operates. A major step was the procurement of district wide Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) data in 2020 that now supports digital tools that map streams, slopes and landforms at much finer resolution than previously possible.

These combined efforts reflect a proactive and collaborative approach to managing forestry pressures in Marlborough.

Catchment management

Significant efforts have been made by the industry, landowners, communities and Council to improve practices and work collaboratively to manage catchments in a way that recognises the connections between land, water, and the marine environment.

Council's Catchment Care programme operates on the understanding that upstream activities impact downstream environments.

This approach ensures that interventions consider the entire catchment system, including soils, waterways, wetlands and estuaries, rather than treating components in isolation. Cumulative effects such as sedimentation, contaminant loading and habitat degradation are tackled by integrating land and water management. Land-use practices have the potential to affect water quality, soil health, biodiversity and overall community well-being.

Targeted, on-the-ground actions are taken to address freshwater issues highlighted by environmental monitoring and the MEP. Projects to date have been focussed on meeting water quality obligations set in the MEP in catchments where water quality has been identified as degraded or at risk of degradation. Driven by the MEP's regulatory requirements, the programme focuses primarily on non-regulatory opportunities to support and invest in the people and communities of Marlborough.

Effective environmental outcomes rely on long-term partnerships among councils, iwi, landowners, industry groups and communities. This collaborative approach builds trust and ensures that solutions reflect local priorities and are enduring. Community-driven Catchment Enhancement Plans are a tool that combines scientific data with local knowledge to identify areas that contribute relatively large amounts of contaminants to water, negatively impacting water quality, and implement targeted actions.

Catchment Care uses techniques such as education, funding incentives, technical and logistical support to encourage landowners to adopt best practices voluntarily. Property-level planning, assistance with riparian planting and fencing as well as erosion-control plans can also aid landowners to reduce sediment and contaminant losses.

Baseline data collection and ongoing water quality monitoring allows Council to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions and refine its response over time.

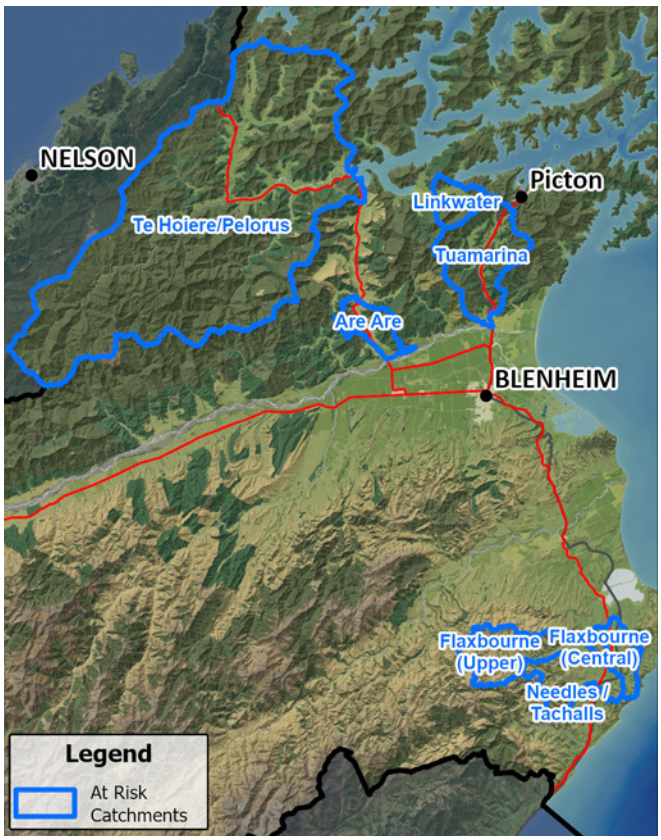


Figure 2: At risk catchments that have received catchment care support

There has been real momentum and engagement through this model. Work has focused on the Are Are Creek, Flaxbourne, Linkwater, and Tuamarina catchments identified in the MEP as degraded or at-risk. To date:

- 66 landowners have engaged with project
- 20+ landowners are installing mitigations
- 10 local businesses have contributed
- 18.8km of waterways have been fenced
- 173 critical source areas have been mapped
- 16.2km of planting has been undertaken

Curent state

Land use

The LCDB and Council's annual field surveys show slow change in land cover or land use in many parts of Marlborough over the reporting period.

Whilst there was significant growth in vineyard area from 1990 into the 2000's, vineyard expansion stalled following the 2008 global financial crisis, picking up again between 2013 and 2020. Expansion has continued at a slower rate since that time. In total, approximately 8,000 ha of new vineyards have been established since 2015 and there were approximately 33,700 ha of vineyard in the district in 2024.

Over time, vineyard has replaced other perennial orchards, arable farming and pastoral grazing which have decreased by approximately 2,200 ha, 1,800 ha and 29,000 ha respectively since 1990.

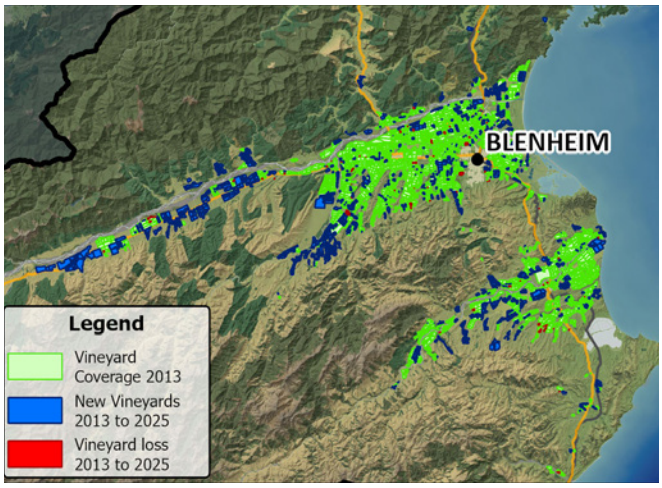


Figure 3: Change in vineyard coverage in Marlborough from 2013 – 2025

Much of the forestry expansion in Marlborough has occurred across the Wairau Southbank and Waihopai Valley hill and high country as subdivision of flat land for vineyards reduced the profitability of former extensive mixed farming properties. The size of the Marlborough forest estate has expanded by 5,800 ha between 2012 and 2023 according to LCDB. Much of this growth has replaced pastoral grassland. Forestry also has a major land cover change as part of its normal harvest cycle.

Mature forests are typically clearcut at harvest and the land can remain bare for 1-2 years prior to replanting. On average across the district around 2,400 ha are harvested each year.

Residential expansion is still occurring on a small scale around Blenheim. Recent legislative changes require Council to make sufficient land available for residential development. Council's policy is to encourage development away from liquefaction prone soils and soils that may be high value for food production. Refer to the urban environments and growth section (page 107). Forthcoming Government policy will seek to identify and protect food producing land by limiting where subdivision for housing can occur.

Figure 4: (over page) Land use in Marlborough as of November 2024. Mapping based on LCDB 2016 plus additional council field data and verification. The Rangitahi / Molesworth Station is presented as "Recreation" on this map due to its status and ownership as a Recreation Reserve. However, the day-to-day land use is a combination of pastoral farming, recreation, and other aligned activities

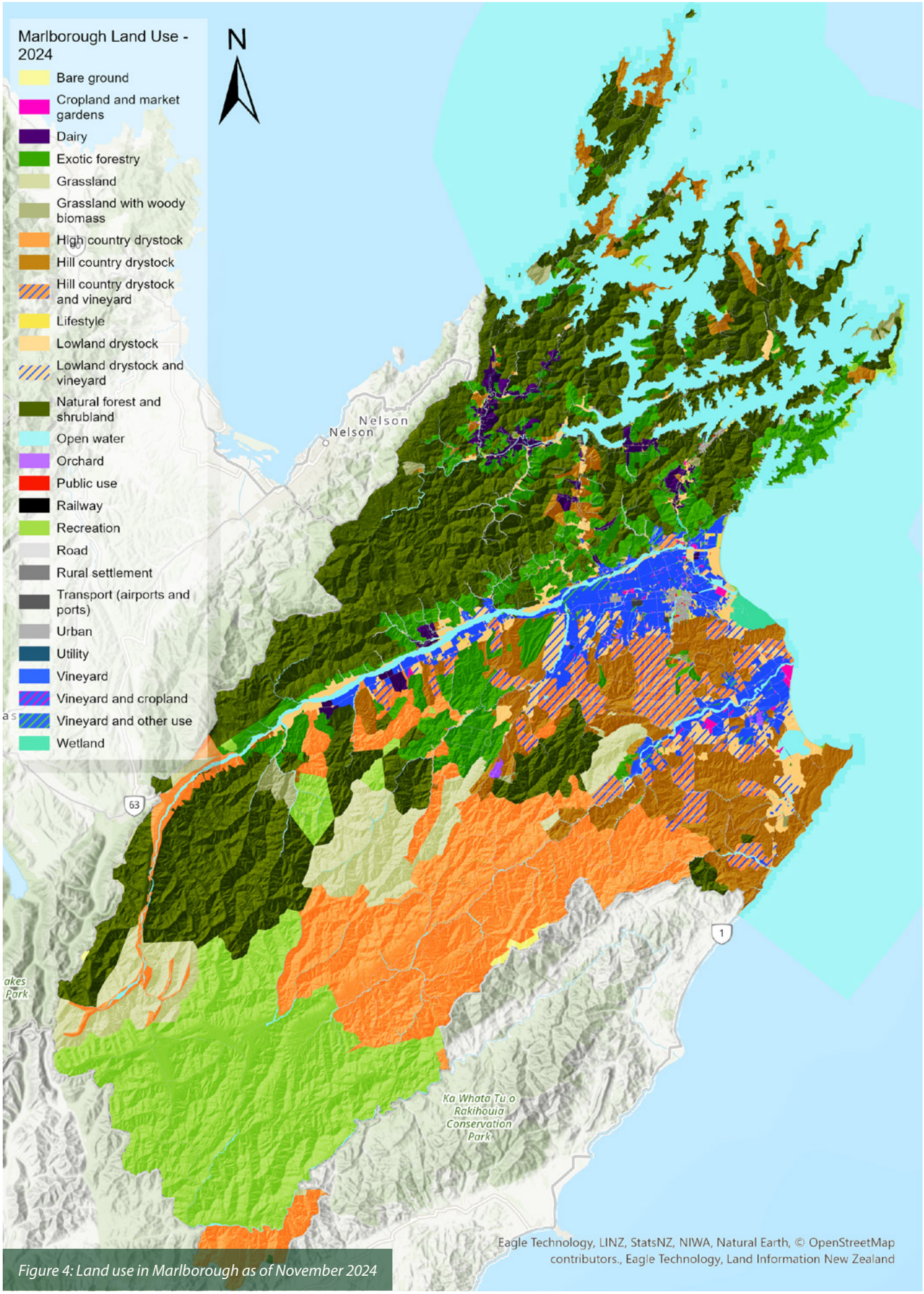


Figure 4: Land use in Marlborough as of November 2024

Figure 5

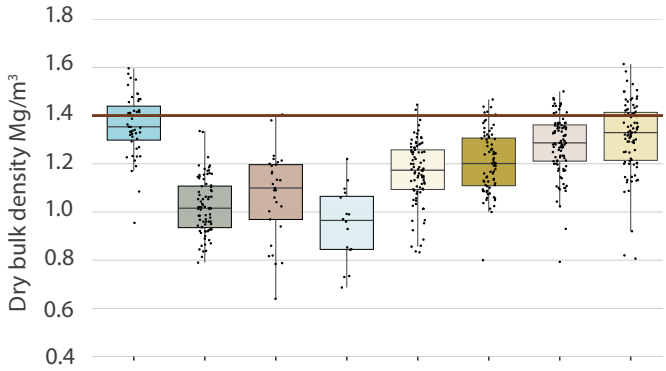


Figure 5: Soil dry bulk density values for all samples since 2000. Reference maximum for all land uses is 1.4 (solid red line).

Figure 6

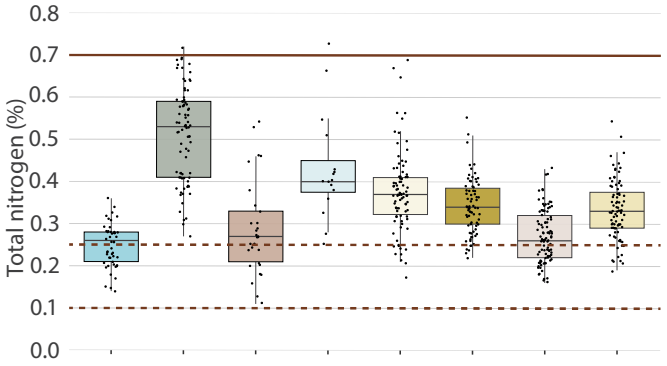


Figure 6: Total Nitrogen by land use for all samples since 2000. Reference ranges are 0.7% max for all land uses (solid line), 0.1% min for forestry (dotted line) and 0.25% min (dashed line) for all other land uses.

Figure 7

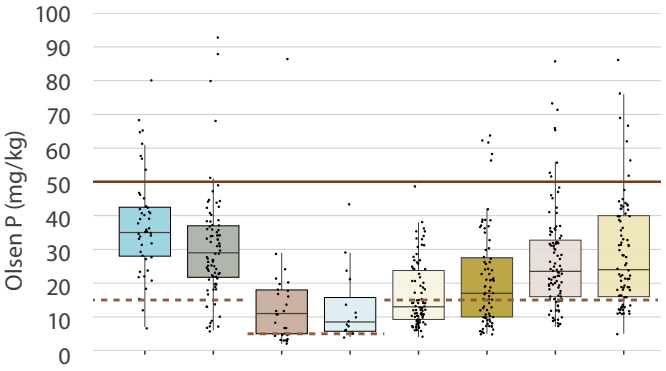


Figure 7: Soil Olsen P values for all samples since 2000. Reference maximum is 50 mg/L for all land uses, Reference minimum for exotic forestry and native bush is 5, other land uses 15mg/L.

Figure 8

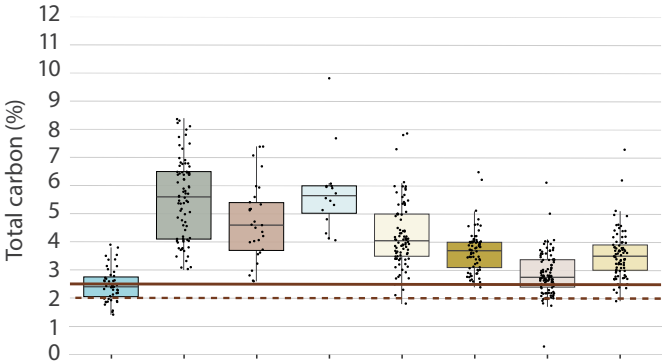


Figure 8: Total carbon by land use for all samples since 2000. Minimum values 2% for Pallic soils (dashed line), 2.5% all other soil orders.



Note: Figures 5 – 8 use box and whisker plots. These graphs show how a set of results is spread out. The coloured box shows where the middle 50% of the data falls, and the middle line shows the median. The "whiskers" show most of the remaining spread. These help show how spread out or uneven the data is.

Soil monitoring

Declining levels of organic matter, excessive levels of fertiliser nutrients and contaminants and increasing soil compaction, have been observed across Marlborough and are monitored as part of Council's monitoring programme. Soil quality monitoring began in Marlborough in 2000 on a five-yearly cycle. By 2016, the original soil quality monitoring sites had gathered three data points, allowing long-term trends to be analysed. The key concerns in 2016 (excess nutrients and trace elements, compaction and soil carbon) remain the primary concerns today, and soil quality indicators continue to show mixed results.

The monitoring programme measures several chemical, biological and physical soil properties to assess soil quality. Soil chemical characteristics are assessed by soil acidity (pH), available phosphorus (Olsen P) and trace element concentrations. Soil biological characteristics are determined by measuring anaerobically mineralisable nitrogen, total carbon, total nitrogen, the carbon:nitrogen ratio, and hot-water carbon. Soil physical conditions are assessed using bulk density, particle density and water release characteristics, which in turn were used to calculate soil porosity parameters.

Some soil parameters have remained stable through the course of the monitoring program such as soil pH.

However, several parameters continue to highlight pressures on soil health. 48% of monitoring samples exhibit compaction issues, restricting water movement. Hot water carbon levels fall below the provisional target in 77% of samples, showing reduced biological activity and organic matter which can reduce water storage, water filtration and nutrient supply. Nutrient imbalances persist, with elevated Olsen P common in vineyards and dairy systems. In cropping and vineyard soils, total carbon and nitrogen levels remain low, increasing vulnerability to structural degradation.

Farm monitoring

Significant efforts have been made to improve environmental sustainability in the district's dairy and other intensive livestock farming practices.

Catchment care programmes in at-risk catchments have supported communities and landowners to undertake mitigations such as improved farm planning, nutrient management, riparian fencing and planting, and these are helping to mitigate contaminants coming off the wider landscape, particularly from intensive livestock farming.

Dairy effluent compliance

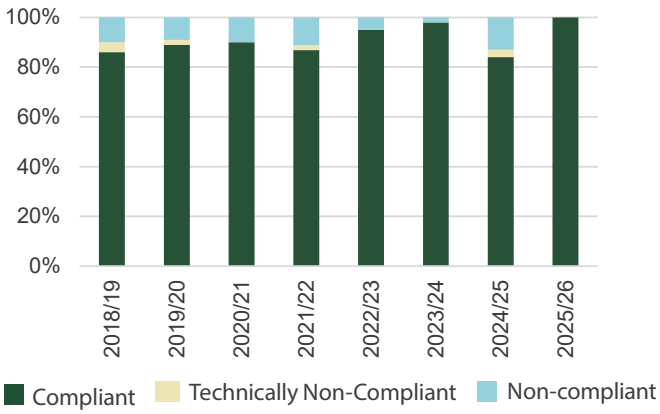


Figure 9: Dairy effluent compliance trends 2019 – 2026

Dairy effluent

A national framework for assessing dairy effluent compliance has been established, and Council applies these standards when monitoring farms. Compliance is evaluated against the permitted activity rules in the MEP or the specific conditions of each farm's resource consent.

Ponding of dairy farm effluent remains the primary cause of non-compliance. This issue is mainly due to inadequate infrastructure maintenance and repairs, and the failure to regularly inspect discharge areas. Council will continue to prioritise addressing these breaches through education and, where necessary, enforcement. Under the MEP, all effluent collection and storage systems must be sealed within 24 months of the Marlborough Plan becoming operative.

In 2025, only four farms remain without lined systems (down from 15 in 2019). This represents a significant improvement.

Stock exclusion

Between 2007 and 2025 all 229 stream crossings have been eliminated, reducing the impact on local waterways and ecosystems. This highlights the progress made over the years to enhance water quality and promote better land management practices. Six of 38 farms contain some areas of fencing still to be completed.

NESFW Synthetic Nitrogen Standards

For the 2024/25 season, two farms reported no use of synthetic nitrogen (N). The highest application rate was 176.93 kg N/ha/year, slightly below the peak of 177.47 kg in the last two years, and 2021/22's 181.33 kg N/ha/year. This downward trend in maximum application rates, combined with 100% compliance with the national cap of 190 kg N/ha/year, reflects strong progress toward sustainable nutrient management across Marlborough's dairy sector. The current government is reviewing these limits as part of the RMA national direction consultation.

Winery waste compliance

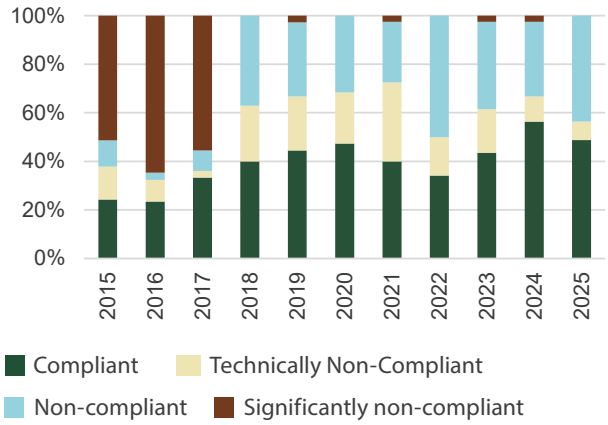


Figure 10: Winery waste compliance trends 2015 - 2025

Winery waste monitoring

Compliance monitoring results show steadily improving outcomes, with significantly fewer cases of serious non-compliance and no significant non-compliances reported in 2025. Nineteen wineries were fully compliant in 2025 (up from 9 in 2015). Although 46% of wineries had non-compliance breaches, these were deemed to have minor environmental effects. Issues included exceeding consented crush volumes, exceeding discharge volumes, ponding, nutrient exceedances and Biochemical Oxygen Demand (BOD) exceedances. These non-compliances may be linked to high production levels in 2025, staff turnover, process breakdowns and infrastructure maintenance challenges.

Forestry monitoring

Monitoring data from Council's compliance programme shows a reduction in significant non-compliance across forestry blocks over the past 13 years. As shown in Figure 12, the proportion of blocks rated as compliant has steadily increased since 2016/17. Minimal significant non-compliance between 2021 and 2024 is notable given the scale and frequency of storm events experienced during these years, which placed additional pressure on site conditions and management systems.

This improvement aligns with the Council's increased use of post-harvest inspections and drone-based monitoring, which enables early identification of risks and supports better management of vulnerable areas such as waterways and stream crossings.

Forestry compliance

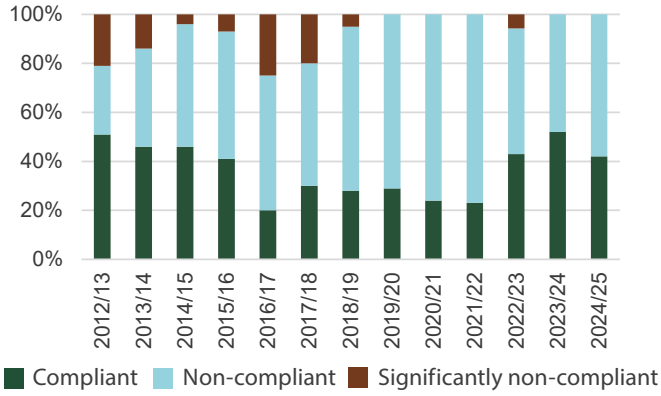


Figure 11: Forestry compliance trends 2013 – 2025

Some areas, particularly stream crossings and soil disturbance, still require attention. These areas remain sensitive to storm events and ongoing land use pressures.

Manual felling methods on steep terrain are increasingly being replaced by machine-based systems such as tethered machinery and smaller swing yarders, improving worker safety and changing how slash interacts with the landscape. Older hauler systems often pushed slash into gullies and waterways, while newer machinery creates more localised disturbance, reducing the risk of debris entering streams. Surface disturbance from machinery, including soil tracking, remains a concern. Even with improvements, soil tracking on exposed slopes can mobilise sediment and continues to pose an environmental risk.

Extreme weather events such as cyclones Fehi, Gita and Gabrielle, along with other atmospheric-river events, have highlighted the ongoing risks of slash and sediment entering waterways. These incidents have increased public scrutiny and pressure on the industry to strengthen environmental safeguards. In response, new practices are emerging, including slash chipping and, in some cases, retiring land where effective sediment or slash management isn't possible.

Smaller-scale harvesting is also becoming more common, as these operations are easier to manage and generally have fewer environmental impacts than large clear-fell areas.

Several forestry companies in Marlborough are showing clear improvements in post-harvest practices. Council has observed that forestry crews are taking greater care to prevent trees and slash from entering streams during felling, which appears to be more effective and more cost-effective than attempting to remove debris afterwards. Slash management at skid sites has improved, with reduced slash accumulation and improved drainage. Roads and tracks are now built with an increased number of more durable water controls designed to withstand intense storms. Ongoing maintenance of these structures outside the harvesting period has become best practice.

Forestry stream crossings continue to present challenges, especially regarding their impact on fish passage and aquatic ecosystems. Innovations such as drift deck crossings which can be constructed with less in-riverbed disturbance, allow for improved fish passage. Moreover, they can be removed after harvesting and used at a different site. Monitoring of the river crossings will continue.

Biosecurity programme

Marlborough has made good progress in containing several invasive species; however, others remain a challenge. Chilean needle grass continues to spread despite the regulatory approach, investment in control and biological control releases. Since 2015, the number of properties affected by chilean needle grass has risen from 159 to 249, an increase of 90 properties affected.

Wilding conifers are rapidly spreading across large areas of the district, affecting places like the Rangitahi / Molesworth, Awatere, Waihopai, East Coast and Marlborough Sounds. In the long term, this will significantly increase fire risk, impact water extraction, alter iconic landscapes and affect agricultural productivity.

Chilean needle grass area

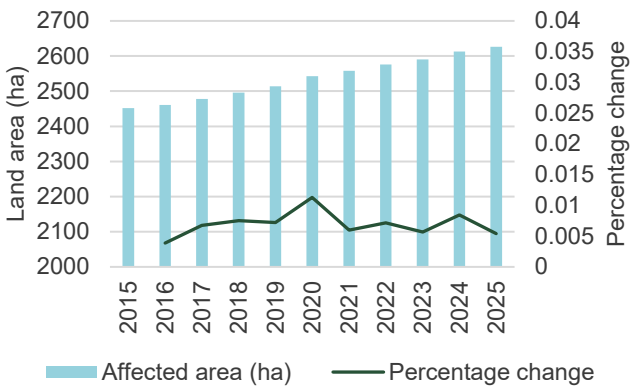


Figure 12: Area affected by chilean needle grass

Invasive plants such as Climbing spindleberry and Chinese Pennisetum (a tall, tufted grass) continue to be suppressed to very low numbers.

Invasive animals such as rabbits have been reduced in numbers and remain relatively low across the district compared to the early 2000s. However, there has been a significant increase in ungulates (wild deer, goats, and pigs) noted across Marlborough in recent years.

Rooks continue to be controlled to zero density as an exclusion pest, with the occasional young bird likely arriving from the North Island. Threats of wallabies establishing continue to be a concern, as they would pose a risk to farmland, forests, and biodiversity if they were to establish in Marlborough.

Biological control research and releases continue to be an essential part of the response to well-established invasive species such as, old man's beard and Chilean needle grass. Council has undertaken several releases across a variety of species.

Since 2015, there has been a significant increase in the number of biosecurity activities and sites. In 2015, there were 757 sites relating to the RPMP programmes, and in 2025, there were 1590. The increase of 833 sites has put pressure on the Council's biosecurity resources.

Contaminated land monitoring

Contaminated land management in Marlborough is now well established. Sites are being identified through planning and development processes. Landowners are required to investigate where necessary and remediate or manage before land use changes occur.

Since 2015 1,823 new HAIL sites have been recorded (sites that could potentially be contaminated due to past or present activities). There have been 272 preliminary investigations and 267 detailed investigations completed with 148 remediation validation reports confirming sites are now suitable for their current use.

WasteMINZ cleanfill/landfill guidance has been integrated into local practice and investment has been made in new systems for tracking and improving public access to information.

The trend over the last decade shows:

- A steady increase in the number of sites identified by Council and investigated by landowners.
- More investigations, both preliminary and detailed, are being conducted earlier in development or consent processes rather than after problems arise.
- Remediation and validation work is increasingly common; more land is being made suitable for reuse.
- Council practice is shifting toward proactive risk management through mapping, tracking, and public information.
- Stronger alignment with national guidance ensures decisions are consistent and transparent.
- This means the overall state of contaminated land management in 2025 is proactive, risk-based, and focused on protecting land for safe future use.

Future response

Council monitoring programmes

New developments in geospatial mapping technology are enabling better mapping of land cover and land use. Council anticipates that as these developments improve this will lead to more accurate and frequent reporting on land use change.

Future work will focus on implementing revised soil quality reference ranges, expanding the number of monitoring sites and promoting farm-scale soil mapping. On-farm soil health workshops will continue, alongside regulatory measures if required under MEP. Council expects to continue holding workshops and expand soil training in the coming years.

Council's focus on integrated catchment management will continue via the Catchment Care programme.

Contaminated land

Council is modernising the way contaminated land information is managed:

- Updating the LLUR to include tracking material movement
- Introducing automated responses to improve efficiency for consent processing
- Developing a public-facing map layer so landowners and the community can easily access information

These improvements will make potentially contaminated land management more transparent, consistent, and efficient.

Biosecurity

Further resources will need to be secured to get ahead of the new and emerging threat species and to maintain existing programmes.

Enhancing on-farm and vineyard engagement to better manage the spread of agricultural weeds is crucial for the long-term control and suppression of these species.

The RPMP will be reviewed in 2027, which is an opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of the current plan and identify additional programmes, including the regulation of activities and surveillance on emerging and future threats.

Managing wilding conifers through both regulatory and non-regulatory programmes continues to be a priority; however, securing sufficient funding for the programme remains a significant challenge for the district.

Working with primary production

Pastoral farming

Liaison with local farmers is ongoing to assist with the implementation and ongoing reporting of the NESFW and stock exclusion requirements. Resource management reform will affect national compliance requirements, but there will still be monitoring of permitted activities and resource consents.

Viticulture

Council intends to continue working with wineries to reduce their environmental footprint including through circular waste initiatives. Future monitoring will focus on improving compliance with MEP standards and resource consent conditions, and on reducing environmental risks associated with wastewater and grape marc disposal.

Key priorities include annual inspections of land application practices, targeted sampling of soil and groundwater to detect nutrient and salt build-up, and verification of containment measures for grape marc leachate.

Forestry

Monitoring during high-risk periods will be expanded to detect early signs of erosion, slash movement and infrastructure failure. Improvements to the monitoring of stream crossing design and maintenance will aim to reduce sedimentation and protect aquatic ecosystems. Monitoring reports will continue to highlight examples of best practice alongside areas of concern to help drive positive change by showcasing effective approaches. Gathering detailed non-compliance data in forestry will help improve the accuracy of environmental reporting, identify recurring issues for feedback to the industry and support targeted enforcement.

Council is developing computer models to identify sites with higher landslide risk due to weak geology, steep terrain or proximity to streams. When combined with harvest plans and timing forecasts, these models will help forest harvest planners assess environmental risk well before harvesting begins.

CHANGES SINCE 2015

- Expansion of soil monitoring sites and new hot water carbon (HWC) indicator introduced to soil monitoring programme to assess microbial activity and soil carbon quality.
- Soil compaction at vineyards and dairy production land, and low organic matter in cropping and vineyards, continue to be persistent issues. Highlighted nutrient risks include elevated phosphorus in vineyards and dairy and nitrogen levels outside the reference range for 29% of samples.
- On-farm soil health workshops initiated in 2024 to promote practical soil management.
- Recent storm events in 2017, 2021 and 2022 highlighted erosion and sediment risks, especially in forestry and vineyards.
- Improvement of winery waste management practices.
- Improved dairy effluent management, elimination of dairy farm stream crossings, fencing and riparian management enhancements.
- Introduction of nitrogen use standards in 2021, with 100% of farms complying with the nitrogen cap of 190 kg N/ha/year.
- Farm environment plans and good farming practices promoted for better water quality and targeted action.
- National Environmental Standards for Commercial Forestry (NESCF) introduced, providing national consistency for requirements of forestry activities.
- Improvements to at risk or degraded catchments through Catchment Care programmes.

Wilding conifers

Wilding conifers (also called wilding pines) are invasive pest trees that spread from seed, originating from past plantings for erosion control, shelter, and forestry.

Wilding conifers occur across New Zealand, with significant infestations in South Marlborough and the Marlborough Sounds.

Without timely investment, these invasive species could infiltrate an additional 600,000 to 800,000 ha of high country, creating a biosecurity risk jeopardising not only our local ecosystems but also water yields, tourism, and agriculture.

Since 2016, Council has been managing Central Government investment in wilding conifer management in Marlborough through the National Wilding Conifer Control Programme (NWCCP) rolled out by Biosecurity New Zealand in partnership with regional councils and unitary authorities across the country.

The region's wilding conifer programme is delivered as an integrated community and agency programme with a strong collaborative model between Biosecurity New Zealand, Council, community trusts, DOC, iwi, Land Information New Zealand and industry representatives.

A regional steering group meets annually to discuss regional priorities and to create a platform for collaboration across the district, ensuring good communication, engagement and constructive relationships with all parties on the steering group.

Given the NWCCP does not address all wilding conifer issues, the whole Marlborough community has a role to play, such as landowners controlling wilding conifers on their own land or adhering to other regulations such as the National Environment Standard for Commercial Forestry (NESCF) when seeking to establish a plantation forest. There are also other avenues for communities or individual landowners to be involved through standalone projects being led by community organisations, or on a site-by-site basis.

For more information go to: www.wildingpines.nz/national-control-programme, and the Marlborough Sounds Restoration Trust and South Marlborough Landscape Restoration Trust websites.



Removing wilding conifers in Tarndale Dec 2023

Catchment Care in Action – Restoring the mauri of Te Hoiere

Ko te whāinga matua ko te whakarauoratanga o te whenua, o ngā wai, o ngā tai moana e matomato ai te tipu, e mauri ora ai te tangata.

We work together to restore the mauri of Te Hoiere land, waters and coast which flourish, along with people's well-being and livelihoods.

Te Hoiere / Pelorus River catchment is one of Marlborough's most ecologically and culturally significant landscapes.

Facing challenges relating to water quality by declining water quality and biodiversity loss, the catchment has become a focal point for restoration through Te Hoiere Project – a catchment identified as a priority in DOC's Nga Awa River Restoration Programme, the MfE's At Risk Catchments Programme, and through Council's MEP, which requires an enhancement plan to be developed and implemented.

Launched in 2020 and aligned to the Kotahitanga mō te Taiao kaupapa framework, Te Hoiere Project brings together the aspirations of the community, iwi, industry, NGO's, Council and Central Government agencies through the collaboratively designed Integrated Catchment Enhancement Plan (ICEP).

The project takes a holistic approach, integrating science, mātauranga Māori and community action. Te Hoiere Kaitiaki Charitable Trust provides leadership and governance for the project, with trustees representing Council, Ngāti Kuia, Rangitāne and the community. DOC and MfE act as special advisors to the Trust.

Ngāti Kuia and Rangitāne have played central roles at all levels of the project, shaping priorities and ensuring cultural values and tikanga are embedded throughout.

This structure has enabled iwi to exercise their role as kaitiaki and has led to the development of a mātauranga monitoring programme by Ngāti Kuia, which aligns with a number of Council's State of the Environment monitoring sites. Reports on sites of significance and placename research share the historic and cultural connection that Ngāti Kuia holds in Te Hoiere / Pelorus.



Planting, Te Hoiere project
Credit: Jim Tannock Photography



Planting, Te Hoiere project

Through Te Hoiere Project, Council has built and strengthened relationships with Ngāti Kuia, Rangitāne and other project partners, which are vital for the long-term vision of restoring the mauri of Te Hoiere / Pelorus.

Alignment of community and iwi aspirations with objectives in the MEP and broader conservation goals has enabled more efficient and effective use of resources. Initial Catchment Condition Surveys completed across 9,753 ha, identified 895 km of streams and rivers, critical source areas and potential fish passage barriers. This information was used to support landowners in planning mitigation activities, including fencing and planting, with the aim of improving environmental outcomes and providing on-farm benefits like improved stock health and farm management. By mid-2025, Te Hoiere Project had established over 220,000 native plants across 64 hectares and completed 89.3km of riparian/wetland fencing. As a result, water quality at key monitoring sites is showing early signs of improvement.

An emphasis on partnerships and collaboration has enabled a range of research projects to be completed. For example, the project's forestry group has five research projects underway or completed.

The forestry database and access accord provides a pathway to access forestry land to support research or monitoring projects like pekapeka bat monitoring and freshwater fish distribution surveys.

The recently completed Forestry Transition Report provides a 'how-to' guide for foresters who may want to transition out of plantation forestry, and three other projects examine baseline sediment, riparian planting methodologies and the impacts of ungulates in forestry settings.

Council has provided expertise across a wide range of workstreams including freshwater ecology, fish passage assessment and remediation, hydrology, catchment planning and environmental monitoring. Taking a ki uta ki tai, mountains to the sea, approach, Te Hoiere Project has developed a number of additional plans to address challenges within the catchment. These plans include the Riverbank Erosion and Sediment Management Plan and the Motuweka / Havelock Estuary Restoration Plan. Each of these plans outlines various methodologies to address catchment-scale issues like sedimentation and biodiversity loss.



Large Kākahi (freshwater mussel) from DoC survey at Tunakino

Hill Country Erosion Programme

Marlborough has a large and diverse land area of over 10,000 km², with 89% classified as hill country in land use classes 6, 7 and 8, much of which is erosion-prone or actively eroding.

Loss of productive land through erosion has a significant impact on the environment and the economy.

Reducing erosion in the upper areas of a catchment costs less than the cost of flooding and of flood-control structures in the lower areas. The Hill Country Erosion Programme (HCE) is a government and council-funded initiative that partners with MPI, regional councils and landowners to combat soil erosion on vulnerable farmland by planting trees and implementing sustainable land management.

Run in four-year cycles, the key goals of the programme are to protect the receiving environments by reducing sediment and nutrient runoff into rivers, retain productive topsoil and build resilience during intense weather events.

There is a range of planting options available to landowners trying to manage erosion including exotics, native afforestation and natural regeneration.

HCE has been operating in Marlborough since 2018 to provide landowners with the support, advice and financial incentives they need to make decisions about controlling erosion on their hill slopes.

The table below outlines the amount of work funded by HCE to date.

Erosion treatment	2019-2025
Poplar & willow poles planted	15,406
Native seedlings planted	172,207
Exotic forestry woodlots (hectares)	50ha
Kilometres of fencing	18km

Council's next application to MPI for funding over the next four years will take place in 2026. If successful, HCE will continue in Marlborough from July 2027 to June 2031.



Example of erosion in South Marlborough Hill Country



Planting to mitigate erosion

Ngā taiao tāone me te tipuranga
Urban environments and growth

Urban growth is important to Marlborough's success and represents the way Council, the private sector and the community utilise our land resources to deliver housing and business growth, now and into the future.



It is important to plan where, how and when more development will happen to ensure growth continues with adequate infrastructure.

Planning also needs to consider land resources, highly productive areas, natural hazards and climate change. This applies to both greenfield (undeveloped land without infrastructure) and brownfield (previously developed land with infrastructure).

Council's role in this space is centred on strategic direction and infrastructure, rather than physical land development. Council provides for urban growth through zoning of land and associated zone rules in the MEP. Council also manages the staging and provision of infrastructure.

Pressures

Availability of suitably zoned land for residential

Council continues to implement Growing Marlborough, the 2014 growth strategy for the district, including through the MEP, which at notification in 2016 provided for 30 years of urban growth. However, population growth and market pressures mean demand for housing and business land in Blenheim continues.

Provision of infrastructure

Infrastructure such as stormwater, roads and footpaths is delivered through staged and sequenced investment informed by growth projections. When growth outpaces infrastructure delivery, pressures on existing infrastructure increase. Unplanned development can change the expected direction of growth and interrupt Council's staged and sequenced approach.

Development contributions

Council charges development contributions (DC's) in accordance with the Local Government Act 2002 to recover the costs of development. While developers have raised concerns about DC costs, these are essential to ensure a fair funding mechanism for network expansion without relying solely on general rates. DCs ensure that those that create the need for upgraded infrastructure pay for the cost of the upgrade. The policy (contained in the Long Term Plan) is reviewed regularly to ensure it remains fair and effective.

External factors such as economic conditions, Marlborough's changing population, and increased demand for affordable housing also place pressure on the development and supply of appropriate housing. Additionally, changing demand for different types and locations of business land and buildings continues to shape Marlborough.

Noise

As communities grow and people live closer together, noise can become a bigger issue, affecting how we feel in our environment. Every area has its own background noise, like wind, traffic, or construction, and what counts as 'too noisy' differs for each person. Unreasonable noise usually means unwanted or disruptive sound, depending on its volume, duration, frequency and time of day.



Frost fans

Types of noise complaints received 2024/2025

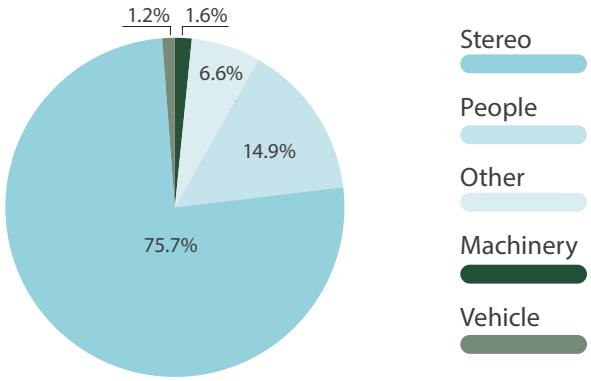


Figure 1: Types of noise complaints received by Council from 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025

Most noise complaints relate to loud stereo noise. When homes are built near industrial or rural areas, residents may not be familiar with machinery, vehicle or farming sounds, leading to more complaints. In Marlborough, vineyards are common, and frost fans used to protect crops can be noisy. Other vineyard tools like the gas guns used to deter birds can also disturb nearby homes. When new housing is located close to existing vineyards, 'reverse sensitivity', where new residents are affected by noise from long-established activities, becomes an issue. In these cases, homes should be designed to reduce noise effects.

National direction and government reform

Since the 2015 State of the Environment Report, two National Policy Statements on Urban Development have been introduced. These documents provide national direction for urban development. The National Policy Statement on Urban Development Capacity 2016 (NPSUDC 2016) directed councils under the Resource Management Act to ensure sufficient capacity for housing and business development. It emphasised evidence-based monitoring, responsive planning, coordinated decision making, and enabling varied urban growth. The NPSUDC aimed to ensure well-functioning urban environments that supported wellbeing, infrastructure, and efficient land use.

The NPSUDC was replaced in 2020 by the more comprehensive National Policy Statement on Urban Development 2020 (NPSUDC). The NPSUDC shifts from the previous narrow focus on development capacity to a broader goal of well-functioning urban environments. It introduces mandatory intensification, removes minimum parking requirements, embeds Māori values and requires responsive planning, while retaining housing and business assessments within a more integrated, tiered framework. Council is required to give effect to National Policy Statements through workstreams in regional planning.

Response

The MEP provides four urban residential zones, ensuring a wide range of residential development possibilities and appropriate rules for different areas.

Urban Residential 1 and 2 (UR1, UR2) are the most widely used residential zoning, with UR1 located in central Blenheim. Urban Residential 3 (UR3) is a low-density zone between the relatively higher-density UR1 and UR2 and lifestyle/rural areas. The new medium-density UR4 is modern, having been developed since 2016 and it only has a small spatial extent currently. This new zoning provides additional options for housing typologies.

The MEP also included new provisions related to papakāinga, both standalone and related to marae activity. Papakāinga is defined in the MEP as a traditional Māori settlement area on Māori land, or on land obtained through Treaty settlement legislation and owned by an iwi entity or held in trust for the benefit of iwi, that is used and occupied in accordance with principles of tikanga and kaitiakitanga, and includes activities associated with residential living.

In zones where papakāinga is a permitted activity, a maximum of five units is allowed on a Record of Title, and there are minimum land areas and setback standards. These recognise that papakāinga must be developed in a manner consistent with the surrounding environment, in particular the settlement's physical needs for water supply and waste disposal.

The MEP provided for 30 years of growth at the time it was notified, but it needs regular review to stay up to date with demand and supply. Council voluntarily undertakes regular Housing and Business Capacity Assessments to understand the supply and demand of housing and business land in Blenheim. The 2022 assessment highlighted a potential shortfall of supply of land for homes in the long term (30 years). However, in response to changes in population projections resulting in lower demand, the 2025 assessment suggests supply of zoned land is likely adequate, but that there is possibly a mismatch between the type of housing needed versus what is being built.

Council has also begun investigating the feasibility of residential intensification in the brownfield areas of central Blenheim.

The MEP identifies noise as an important issue and sets limits to protect people's health and well-being, while still allowing normal daily activities. These limits differ by land zoning and reflect expected background noise levels for the types of activities common in each zone.

Climate change and natural hazards are key considerations for urban development. Council considers risks such as flooding, liquefaction and sea-level rise when deciding where and how growth should occur. Some areas are avoided because of these risks.

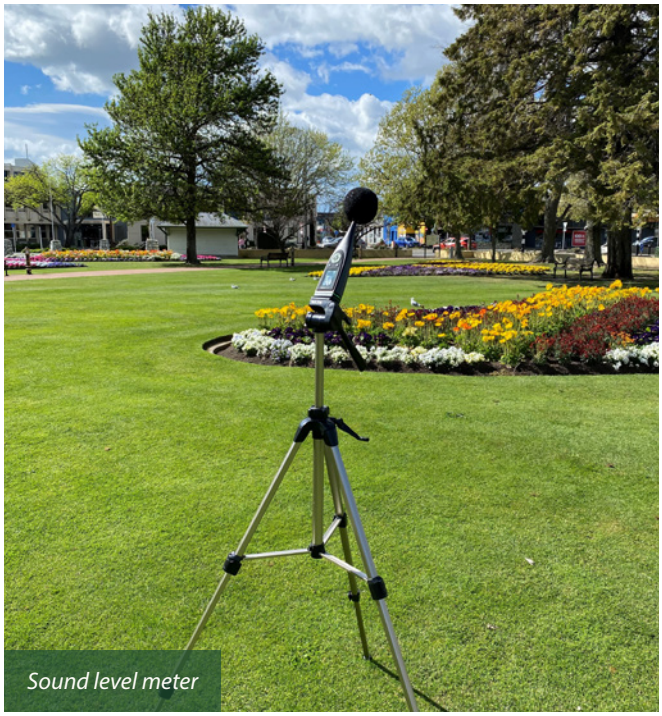
Developers have continued to deliver complex residential and industrial projects to the market since 2015, despite the market cycles. This demonstrates these large-scale projects, such as Westwood or Wai-Iti, can 'bridge' changing economic times and remain feasible.

Noise

Council takes all complaints about excessive or unreasonable noise seriously and responds to them 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Every complaint is investigated, and the outcome is recorded. Depending on what is found during the investigation, the outcome may be:

- No noise was heard at the time
- Noise was present, but not considered excessive
- The noise was excessive, and a formal notice was issued to reduce it
- The noise was excessive, and the equipment was seized to stop it
- The source of the noise could not be located

For ongoing or more complex noise issues, the Environmental Health Team will use a sound level meter to measure the noise levels. These measurements help determine whether the noise complies with the MEP or any relevant resource consent conditions.



Sound level meter

Building consents issued for new houses by reporting year

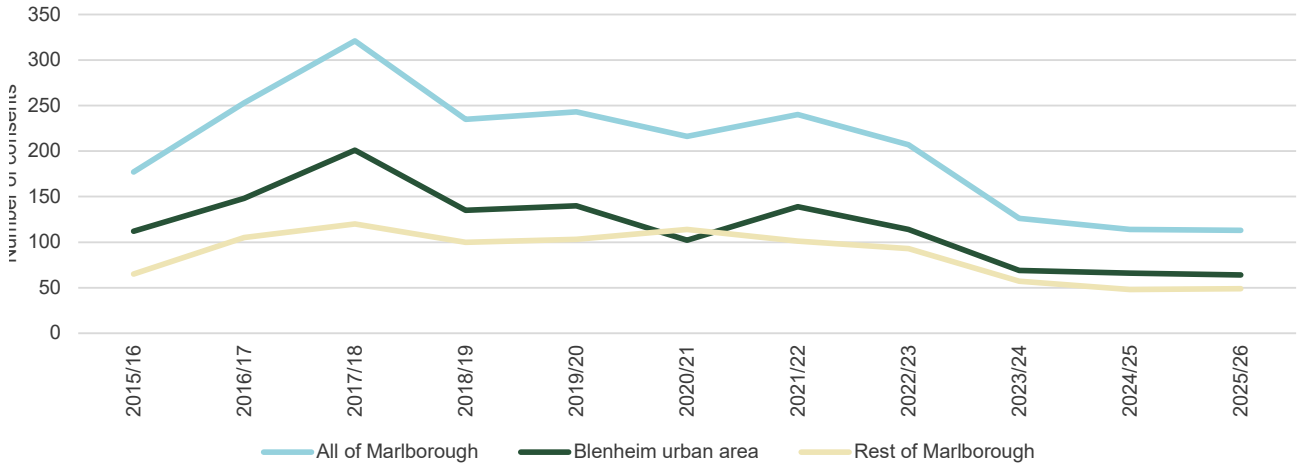


Figure 2: Building consents issued for new houses by reporting year

Current state

Urban development dashboard

Council monitors housing trends regularly via the Urban Development Dashboard, which is available on Council's website. Key indicators are reported annually to track changes and are updated in real-time. Indicators show:

- Council has issued over 2,000 building consents for new dwellings in Marlborough since 2015, 56% of which were in the Blenheim urban area. (Figure 2)
- The number of new subdivisions created each year has risen slightly since 2015, with a significant increase during 2020/21 at the peak of the market. Growth in 2024/25 remains slower.
- Housing affordability has improved in the last three years, but Marlborough is still considered unaffordable overall and more unaffordable compared to 2015.
- Mortgage payments are generally considered unaffordable if they are more than 40% of take-home income. According to this affordability measure, housing in Marlborough is less affordable in 2025 than in 2015.
- There is an emerging trend of brownfield infill development. Resource consents issued for new subdivisions have increased slightly in the Blenheim urban area but decreased in other parts of the district. Greenfields development has not increased since the previous years' reporting. These factors point to a preference for infill housing or brownfield development within the Blenheim urban area over greenfield development. Westwood Business Park and CBD activity

Over the past decade, Westwood (a large format retail park on Blenheim's western fringe) has been completed. This area now hosts major retailers and has attracted national chains from Blenheim's CBD, reflecting a broader trend toward large-format retail in greenfield areas. While this shift has changed the CBD's retail landscape, there has been significant investment in public facilities in the town centre since 2015, including Stadium 2000, Whitehaven Theatre (formerly ASB Theatre) and Marlborough Events Centre, the car park building and Marlborough Library Te Kahu o Waipuna.

Greenfield development

Greenfield development has remained a prevalent trend since 2015. Summerset in the Northwest of Blenheim received resource consent in 2021 to provide a new retirement village. This is a significant in the retirement sector for Blenheim and is anticipated to house over 300 residents.

A number of residential greenfield developments have also progressed on zoned land since the 2015 State of the Environment report, including Rose Manor, Wai-iti, Bartlett's Green, and development at Omaka Landing and Boulevard on Taylor. This has led to greenfields growth across the Blenheim fringe. Industrial and commercial greenfield development includes ongoing development to Cloudy Bay Business Park, expansion to the Omaka Heritage Centre, Summerset retirement village in Springlands, and Westwood.

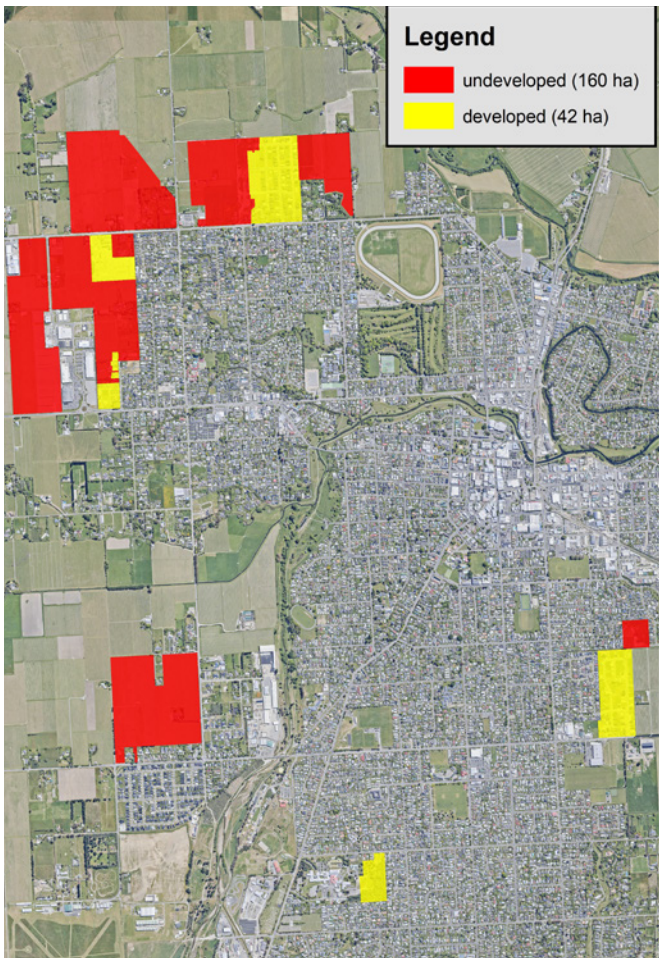


Figure 3: Map showing greenfield land development status in the Blenheim urban area as at December 2025

A summary of the recently developed and undeveloped zoned greenfield areas is shown in Figure 3. The remaining approximately 160ha of undeveloped land contains approximately 1,800 residential sections.

Brownfield residential development

Another trend that has been noted particularly in 2020 - 2025 has been brownfield infill development in the existing urban area. Both the public and private sectors have taken part in brownfield development.

Council's 2023/24 monitoring of resource consents issued for new subdivisions shows these have increased slightly in the Blenheim urban area but decreased in other parts of the district. Additionally, resource consents for greenfield development had not increased since the previous years' reporting. These factors support an increasing preference for infill housing or brownfield development within the Blenheim urban area over greenfield development.

Brownfield development relates to building more dwellings within the same land footprint, such as:

- Adding a second dwelling to the backyard of an existing property
- Comprehensively redeveloping a whole property, replacing a single dwelling with multiple dwellings on the same site
- Developing different typologies of housing, such as multi-storey attached townhouses, or two-storey dwellings.

Brownfield development has been a significant change in the broader makeup of housing stock and has led to higher-intensity accommodation towards the centre of town.

In the public sector, Housing New Zealand has undertaken several brownfield redevelopments in Blenheim since 2015. Council has also been involved in brownfield development, with the construction of new two-story apartments on an existing site purchased by Council in 2012. Marlborough Sustainable Housing Trust also operates in this space, in both rental housing and shared ownership. This work is supported by Council.

The private sector has also been active, particularly over the last five years post-COVID, developing either single infill or comprehensive redevelopment in the Blenheim Urban Area. A clear trend has been established for single-story, low-maintenance townhouses. Two-story townhouses have also been developed.

Noise

Noise complaint numbers have been trending down from 2015 - 2025 (Figure 4). Of those complaints received, the majority were assessed as non-excessive or no noise on arrival.

When noise is deemed to be excessive, an Excessive Noise Direction (END) is issued requiring the noise to be immediately reduced. While overall complaints are down, the number of ENDs issued has increased over the past 10 years (Figure 5).

If an END is not adhered to, then the equipment making the noise can be seized and held by Council pending payment of all associated costs.

Number of noise complaints per year

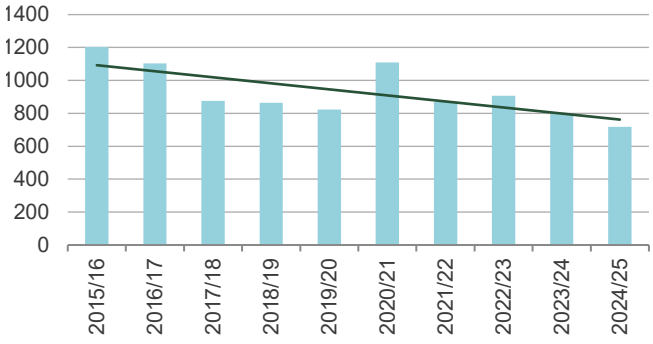


Figure 4: Noise complaints received by Council per year

Excessive noise directions issued

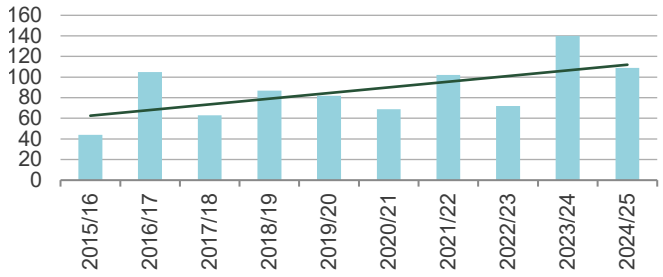


Figure 5: Excessive Noise Directions issued by Council per year

Council can also determine not to return the equipment if there has been a history of noise from the property from which the equipment was seized.

Future response

Council is aware of several private developments that will come to the market within the next decade, continuing the provision of urban growth.

These include:

- The completion of the final stages of the Rose Manor development.
- The Wairau Housing Development / Waikārapi, situated on Hospital Road in Witherlea, Blenheim. This greenfield project was released to the public in October 2025 and offers 94 residential sections, ranging in size from 165 m^2 to 615 m^2.
- Brownfields expansion of Bethsaida in Redwoodtown is also ongoing and there is a signal through purchase of a significant brownfields section in Springlands that additional retirement development may occur in the future.
- Omaka Business Park is a greenfields industrial development located adjacent to Omaka Landing residential subdivision. The lots range in size and will be developed and sold over five stages, with the first tenants built and occupied in Stage 1 in 2025.
- Potential for private sector to develop residentially zoned but currently undeveloped land in the west and northwest of Blenheim.
- Council is aware that several landowners of rurally zoned land are considering the potential to develop property for residential purposes through plan change or resource consent.
- Council is working on better education materials about noise, for both complainants and those causing the noise including clear information on Council's website and will continue to train Noise Control Officers to ensure a fair and consistent response.

CHANGES SINCE 2015

- The Marlborough Environment Plan (MEP) contains a new Urban Residential 4 zone, which provides for medium density housing.
- Ongoing greenfields development, including commercial, industrial and residential use of land is specifically zoned to provide for growth.
- There is a newer trend of brownfields infill in central Blenheim.
- A new real-time monitoring dashboard for the National Policy Standard for Urban Development 2020 (NPSUD) has been created.
- The property market continues to change, with a general increase in property values.
- Developments including Boulevard on Taylor, Cambourne Crescent, Ara Drive, Omaka Landing and Westwood Business Park have been completed.
- The ex-Clubs of Marlborough building has been redeveloped into a new venture including a restaurant and wine and food tasting venue, and the adjoining brownfields site is being redeveloped into a hotel.
- Noise complaints have reduced each year and have trended down since 2015.
- Complaints continue to come from a range of sources, and most complaints are about loud stereos in urban areas.

Kerepi plan variation

Plan variations 6 and 7 to the MEP to enable the Kerepi development were a good example of a private plan change for residential development helping to meet the need for mixed densities of residential housing.

In 2022, Kerepi Limited purchased land on Old Renwick Road to the north of central Blenheim.

Their vision was to create a well-designed residential development with mixed housing densities, offering a variety of homes and building a diverse community. The development aimed to deliver around 170 residential lots.

Council considered that Kerepi would fit well into the wider Blenheim urban environment because the location was close to existing housing and was well-connected to transport corridors. The mix of densities offers a range of housing options. Variation 6 to the MEP, "Kerepi," proposed to change the rurally zoned land to a combination of residential zones:

- 5.5 ha to Urban Residential 2, an existing residential zone. This area would be around the site's perimeter, at a density of 10–12 dwellings/ha, creating approximately 66 lots of standard single-storey housing.
- 6.4 ha to a higher intensity residential use than was provided for at the time, to create some medium-density housing. This rezoning would apply to the centre of the site, with a higher density of 16–17 dwellings/ha, resulting in approximately 80 homes in a mix of townhouses and smaller dwellings. Because the MEP was yet to be made operative, the new Urban Residential 4 zone to provide for medium-density housing could not be created through a private plan change as part of Variation 6. Therefore, a separate variation to the MEP, Variation 7, was completed concurrently.
- A number of reserves and stormwater areas would also be created.

The plan change process took about 12 months from public notification in April 2024 to decision in February 2025.

Council received a combined resource consent application in June 2025 for a comprehensive and fully integrated subdivision and development of the Kerepi site. The application included medium-density development, earthworks, the establishment and operation of show homes, and subdivision to create 169 residential allotments across seven stages. Sixty-four lots will be Urban Residential 2, and 105 lots will be the higher density Urban Residential 4. As of March 2026, the application was in the final stages of determining draft consent conditions.



Kerepi Grove residential development

Ngā ahoaho
Open spaces

Marlborough has a wide choice of public open spaces that significantly contribute to the health and well-being of the environment and our community.



Victoria Domain, Picton

These include sports and neighbourhood parks (used for play, sport and recreation), gardens, nature areas (farm parks, bush and wetlands), cultural heritage areas (historic sites and cemeteries), recreation and ecological reserves and civic spaces (for community gatherings and events).

Council manages over 440 parks and reserves that enhance the quality of the built and natural environment and provide a range of recreation opportunities for everyone to enjoy.

Pressure

Financial

The cost of managing and developing open spaces is increasing as council acquires new parks, responds to community expectations and delivers to agreed levels of service.

This will continue to be a challenge with a potential future reduction in revenue from growth (as the supply of developable land reduces over time) and the ongoing cost of renewal and replacement of assets as they reach the end of their useful life as Council does not budget for the cost of replacement of some open space assets.

Soil contamination

Historic land uses have left a legacy of localised contamination that can restrict the development of land for park purposes, especially in new greenfield sites.

Climate change and natural hazards

Managing and mitigating the effects of climate change and natural hazards is an ongoing challenge. Earthquakes, flooding and drought impacts, while difficult to plan for, will continue to shape how open spaces are managed, developed and used.

Community

Marlborough's population continues to grow and become more diverse. Changing community and visitor expectations create new challenges and opportunities for open spaces. For example, user expectations for the type of surface and amenities provided on cycle trails, and expectations for an increase in the provision of public toilets, rubbish bins and dog parks.

Response

Long-term planning focuses our resources where needed the most and spreads the cost of managing and developing open spaces over time.

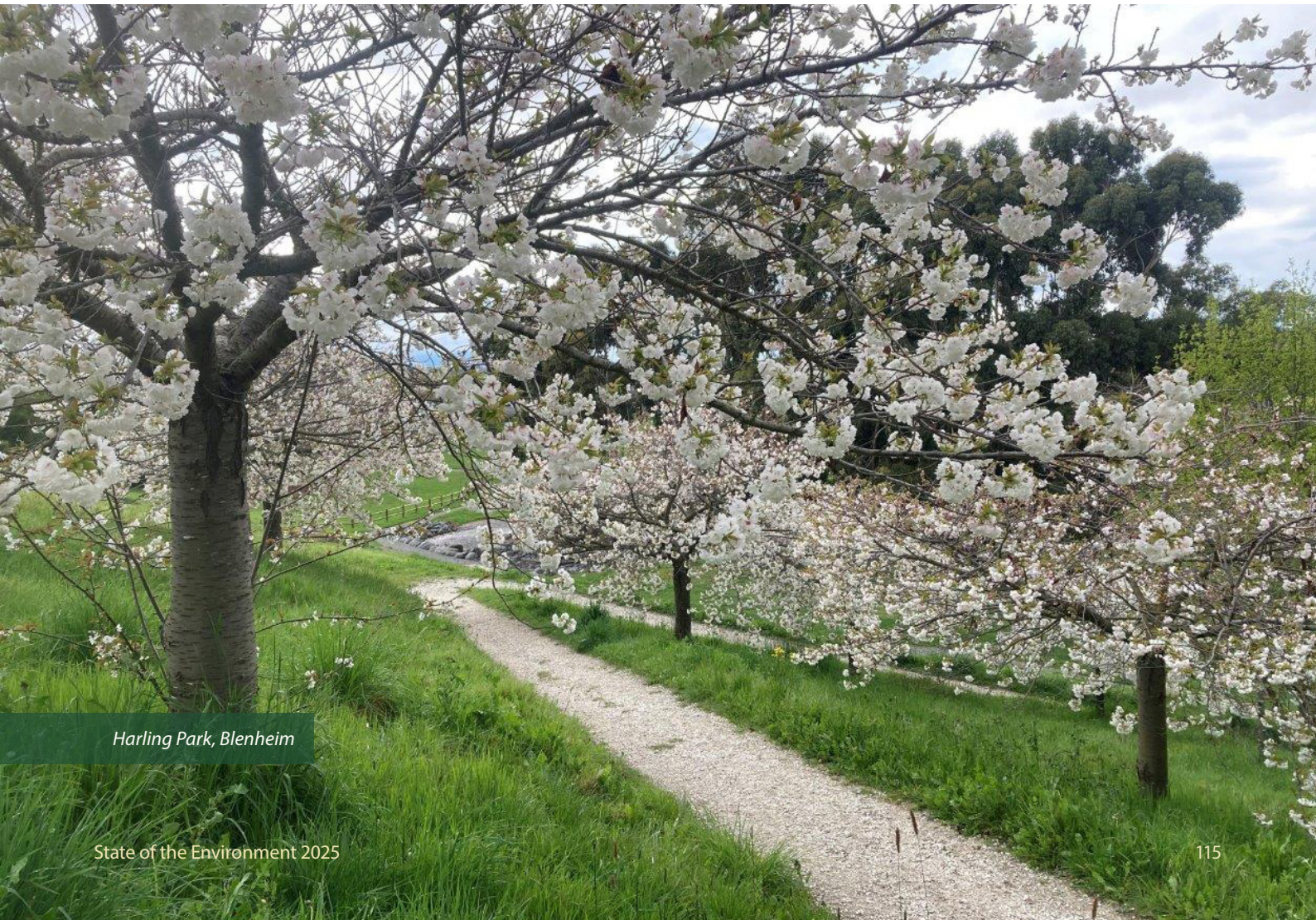
It helps to understand where trade-offs are required and what can be achieved within available resources.

In addition to Council's Long Term Plan, key plans include the parks and open spaces asset management plan and reserve management plans. Significant effort has been put into asset data capture and analysis over the past few years to inform our asset management plan. This work is an ongoing focus of Council as it improves data integrity and better supports planning and budget processes.

Opportunities for cost saving and utilising external funding are identified where possible. For example, utilising Central Government funding to widen walking and cycle paths along the Taylor River Reserve.

Improving resilience is a key consideration when renewing, replacing assets, and building new assets. Increasing our asset knowledge will further enhance how we approach this.

Open spaces are managed to respond to climate change impacts. For example, closing drought affected parks in summer to minimise fire risk to the public.



Harling Park, Blenheim

Current state

Cemeteries, parks, reserves and sportsgrounds consistently rank in the top five performing services of Council, based on the annual resident satisfaction survey.

There has been a notable increase in the use of open spaces over the last 10 years for a variety of activities, including sport, active and passive recreation, events and play. Initiatives such as the development of multi-sport facilities at the Lansdowne Hub maximise the use of open space and create destinations for the community to participate in a wide range of activities.

Wider sector feedback and benchmarking against industry standards indicate that Marlborough is performing exceptionally well with the quantity, quality and diversity of open spaces on offer.

Future response

Implementation of the 10-year programme of policies and plans will ensure Council is proactively responding to increasing pressure over time.

For example, understanding the cumulative impact of growth and rising community expectations for service levels.

Providing clarity on expectations for the quality and quantity of parks and reserves to serve new growth will help ensure that new open spaces meet community needs and are designed to best practice standards.

Climate change modelling information will support planning for future impacts, particularly for open space in coastal and low-lying areas.



Seymour Square, Blenheim

Changes since 2015 at a glance

Council has continued to invest in open spaces, recognising the considerable value that the community places on this network.
This includes:

- Planting programmes, such as Taylor River Reserve, Kahikatea Reserve, Koromiko Forest Reserve, Marshalls Place Reserve and Beacons Road Reserve.
- Pest control programmes such as Queen Elizabeth II covenant on Wither Hills Farm Park and rabbit control in specific areas.
- Improvements to existing reserves, such as planting, shading, seating, and play equipment.
- New reserve purchases and developments, like Rose Manor Reserve and Ōkiwi Bay Reserve.
- Extensions and widening of trails, including Taylor River Reserve, Wither Hills Farm Park and Victoria Domain.
- Facility developments, such as Lansdowne Hub, award-winning public toilets, the hockey pavilion and turf at Marlborough Girls College, and Marlborough Equestrian Park.
- Cemetery enhancements, including public shelters, plantings, natural burial sites and memorial walls.
- Plans and policies like the Sports Facilities Strategic Plan, Responsible Camping Control Bylaw, Wither Hills Management Plan, Waikawa Bay Foreshore Reserve Management Plan, Victoria Domain Reserve Management Plan, and Provision of Specialist Change Facilities Policy.

Further information on the council's open spaces can be found on the Marlborough District Council website.

Wither Hills Farm Park

Wither Hills is an iconic and highly valued farm park in Marlborough, providing a prominent backdrop to Blenheim and the surrounding lower Wairau Valley.

Since the original purchase of land in 1944 to address soil conservation issues, significant effort has gone into stabilising the hills to protect Blenheim.

Re-establishing vegetation has been extremely challenging due to the dry climate and low-fertility soils. However, continued efforts over many years have been effective in progressively stabilising slopes and reducing the movement of silt. A 40-hectare area of dryland forest in Sutherland Stream is protected through a QEII covenant established in 1994.

While soil conservation reserve remains the primary purpose, the 1,000-hectare park is hugely valued by the community for the recreation opportunities that it provides, including mountain biking and walking/running tracks in a rural and farmed environment. The Park currently provides 19 km of walking tracks/routes, 26 km of mountain biking trails and 25 km of shared-use tracks, farm roads and routes.

The Wither Hills Management Plan (the Plan) provides policy direction for day-to-day and long-term management for the effective management of soil conservation and other outcomes, such as biodiversity restoration and community use. A review of the Plan in 2024 responded to significant changes over the last 20 years, including the impact of increased extreme weather events, particularly droughts and floods, and increased recreational use. The primary purpose of soil conservation remains the overriding priority.

The Plan identifies the following objectives:

- Minimise soil erosion from hill slopes and along waterways by actively restoring and maintaining vegetative cover.
- Reduce the likelihood of fire ignition and the consequences of fire.
- Offer a variety of recreational activities without adversely affecting other objectives.
- Manage invasive species and ensure landowner compliance obligations under the Regional Pest Management Plan.
- Restore native habitats and enhance the mauri/life force of the Park.
- Maintain the rural pastoral landscape while pursuing the long-term vision of returning to a dryland forest landscape.
- Safeguard significant sites and share the whakapapa of the area
- For more information refer to the Wither Hills Management Plan (2024) on Council's website.



Runners at Wither Hills Farm Park



Wither Hills Farm Park