

**The Extent of
Rural / Residential Development
on
Class 1 and 2 Land**

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The Extent of Rural / Residential Development of Class 1 and 2 Land

1.0 Introduction

Productive land is an important commodity to the Wanganui region, sustaining an agricultural sector that provides a backbone to the local economy. A land capability classification system has been established which segregates land into classes of productive quality. This system uses eight main classes of which class 1 is the highest quality land and 8 is the poorest land. Through Council resolution class 1 & class 2 land have been accorded special attention. Evidence of this lies in the Wanganui District Resource Management Plan Part 3. This is due to the horticultural capability of these two land classes, which cannot be matched in the other 6 land classes.*

Once a certain element of the environment is seen as sensitive and given special attention, it should be monitored in a way which identifies how well the resource is being managed.

A large section of class 1 & class 2 land lies directly to the North of the City's boundary in the Westmere block. While this is not the only block of class 1 and class 2 land in the Wanganui District, it is the block which has had the most subdivision and consequent development. As a result of this and the limits to resources, the study is focussed on the Westmere area. Concern has been expressed about the sustainability of present subdivision practices in this area which result in land subdivided into blocks of 1 hectare or less. It is perceived (not universally) that some small lots have been taken out of primary production for purely residential purposes and that this use could be better accommodated elsewhere, where soil is not as productive. To date little study has been directed toward monitoring the state of the rural environment, and as a consequence the concern expressed above can not be backed up with any conclusive evidence.

2.0 Purpose of Study

This study seeks to put these concerns into perspective, quantifying the degree of residential activity in the Westmere area in terms of the numbers of lots used solely for residential purposes and the area occupied by those lots.

Secondary analysis will explore the results in more detail, attempting to define Council's responsibilities to rural land use and understanding what policies are responsible for managing the rural areas at present. It will then explore the implications of allowing residential properties on class 1 & 2 land.

This will include the following:

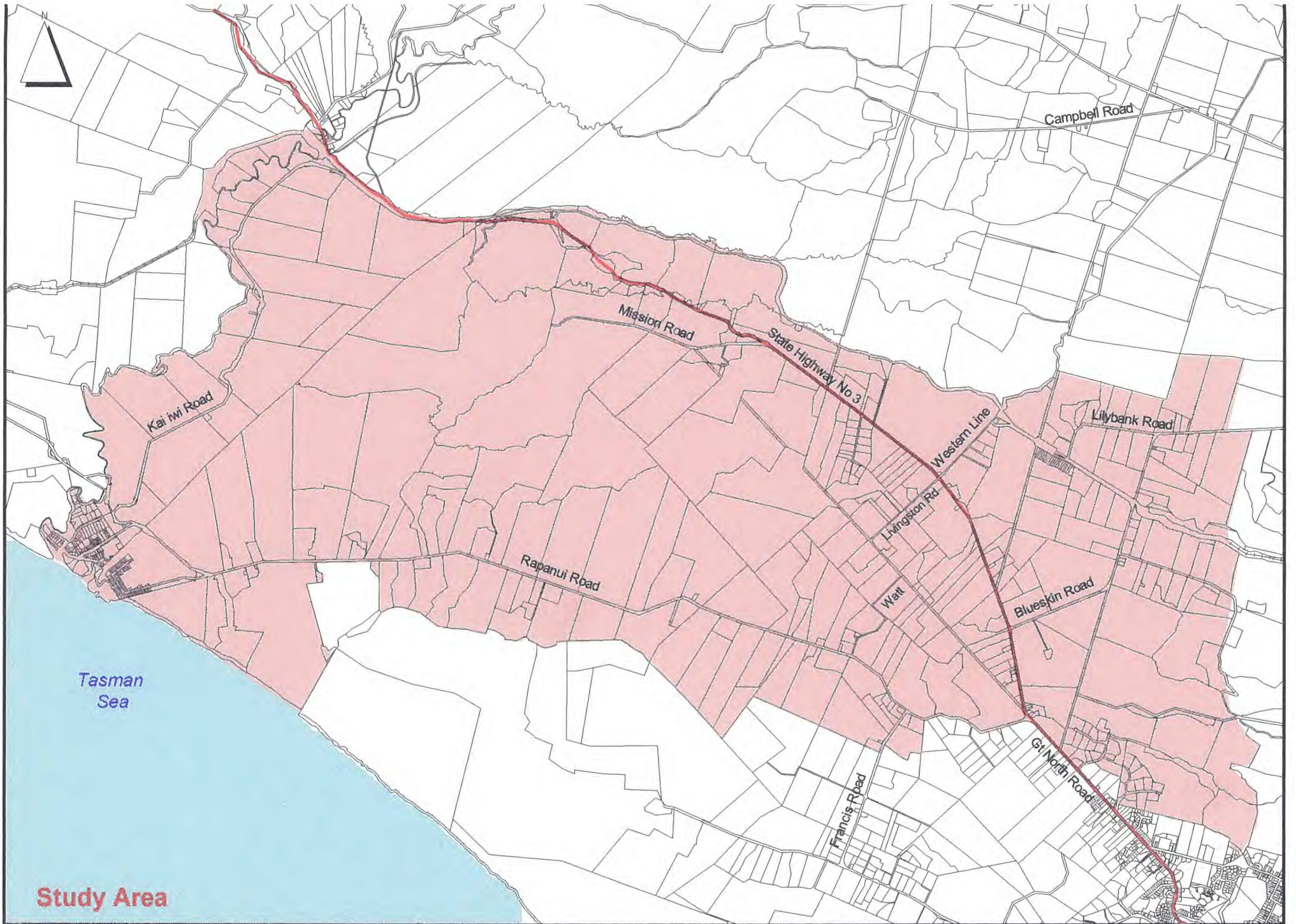
1. What trends are emerging over time?
2. What resource management issues need to be addressed?

3.0 Area of Study

The study area, in the first instance, is limited to the class 1 & class 2 land in the Westmere area. In this area 399 properties occupy an area of 5,379.9 ha

Refer attached locality plan.

* Refer attached map showing total class 1 and class 2 land in the Wanganui District.



Study Area

4.0 Scoping Study

A preliminary study was carried out to determine the extent of smallholdings. The assumption was that small holdings were most likely to be used exclusively for residential purposes.

This study used the valuation NZ data which has a category attached to each lot that explains the use of that lot. The data allocated two types of "Lifestyle" land use. Firstly those lots which have houses and accessory buildings, and secondly those which do not have buildings on them. The results of this study are as follows:

	Number	%
Total number of properties in the Westmere Study Area	399	100%
Total Area of the Westmere Study Area(ha)	5,379.9	100%
Lifestyle Blocks - Improved		
by number	107	26.8%
by area (ha)	466.38	8.6%
Lifestyle Blocks -Vacant		
by number	31	7.7%
by area (ha)	195.9	3.6%
<hr/>		
Total Lifestyle Blocks		
by number	138	34.57%
by area (ha)	662.3	12.2%

4.1 Comment

The above study suffers from certain critical limitations. Of most concern is that while the two categories have been isolated as being used for 'lifestyle' no definition of what is 'lifestyle' is attached to the category. As a result it is not known what selection criteria has been used in allocating 'lifestyle' categories.

A second problem is that 'lifestyle' blocks are not necessarily at issue, as they are not solely used for residential purposes. While there are arguments for and against the effect of lifestyle blocks on productivity, the real concern is on the loss of the long term productive capability of class 1 and class 2 land.

Therefore these results are an indication only of the numbers and extent of smallholdings in the Westmere area. The significance of this is that while the number of smallholdings is relatively high this is offset by the relatively small percentage of land taken up by smallholdings. As land used only for residential purposes is within these findings, the amount of area occupied for residential purposes only, would be very small indeed. The actual extent of this land is ascertained in the main study of this report. No further conclusions should be taken from this scoping study.

5.0 Residential Land Use In The Westmere Study Area

5.1 Method

The 399 properties in the Westmere study area were sorted according to lot size. Three groups were isolated.

- Less than or equal to 1 hectare
- Greater than 1 hectare and less than, or equal to, 2 hectares
- Greater than 2 hectares and less than, or equal to, 3 hectares

Each property in the three groups was inspected and photographed. The properties were individually assessed on land use and sorted into 4 categories. These are residential, lifestyle, purely rural based, or others.

The method of assessment was visual. A property was considered 'residential' when two basic criteria were met. Firstly if grass was mown (rather than grazed) and secondly if the property was landscaped. A property was considered 'lifestyle' when signs of livestock or horticultural activity were evident. The 'rural based' and 'others' categories were easily identified and therefore did not require any visual assessment criteria.

The properties in the three groups identified were individually counted and their areas calculated. These results were then compared to the total group.

Properties Sorted According To Lot Size

	Number	%	Area(ha)	%
Number of properties (Westmere)	399	100%		
Total area (ha)			5,379.9 ha	100%
<hr/>				
Number of properties in Group 1 (less than or equal to 1 ha)	53	13.3%		
Area (ha)			16.5 ha	0.31%
<hr/>				
Number of properties in Group 2 (greater than 1 ha, less or equal to 2 ha)	33	8.3%		
Area (ha)			44.8 ha	0.83%
<hr/>				
Number of properties in Group 3 (greater than 2 ha, less or equal to 3 ha)	24	6.0%		
Area (ha)			57.0 ha	1.06%
<hr/>				
Total number of properties in groups (under 3 ha)	110	27.6%		
Total area of the three groups			118.3 ha	2.2%

The sample above includes approximately a quarter of the total number of properties in the Westmere study area. The land area covered by this sample is 2.2% of the total land in the Westmere study area.

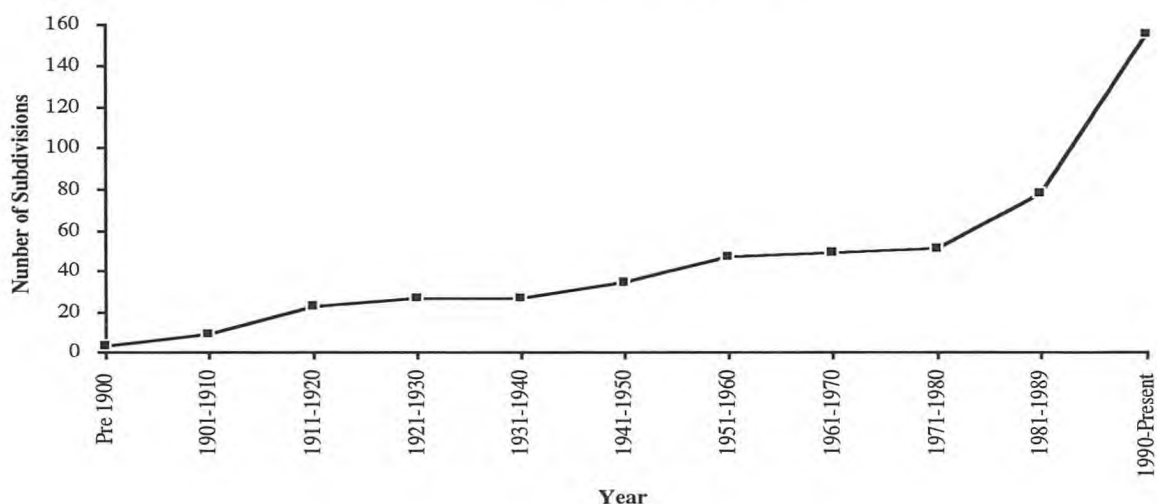
5.2 Results

	Number	%	Area (ha)	%
Group 1 < 1 ha				
Number of residential	30	7.5%		
Total area (ha)			7.71 ha	0.14%
Number of lifestyle	9	2.3%		
Total area (ha)			4.8 ha	0.09%
*Number of other uses	14	3.5%		
Total area (ha)			3.98 ha	0.08%
	53	13.3%	16.51 ha	0.31%
Group 2 >1 ha. <=2 ha.				
Number of residential	3	0.75%		
Total area (ha)			3.5 ha	0.07%
Number of lifestyle	23	5.8%		
Total area (ha)			31.2 ha	0.58%
*Number of others	7	1.8%		
Total area (ha)			10.1 ha	0.18%
	33	8.3%	44.8 ha	0.81%
Group 3 >2 ha. <=3 ha.				
Number of residential	0	0%		
Total area (ha)			0 ha	0%
Number of lifestyle	18	4.5%		
Total area (ha)			42.5 ha	0.79%
Number of horticulture	2	0.5%		
Total area (ha)			5.1 ha	0.1%
*Number of other uses	4	1.0%		
Total area (ha)			9.3 ha	0.17%
	24	6.0%	57.0 ha	1.06%

6.0 Summary of Results

- Most residential activity occurred in group 1. (30 properties out of a possible 53 were residential)
- Some residential activity was apparent in group 2. However this was significantly less than group 1 (only 3 properties out of a possible 33 were residential).
- No residential properties were found in group 3. These results show that properties above 2 ha. are unlikely to be used for solely residential purposes. Therefore this property size represents a threshold.
- The total number of residential properties in the Westmere area was 33 out of a possible 399. This represents a combined area of 11.2 ha., less than 1% (0.21%) of the total study area. It is evident from these results that land occupied for purely residential use has little effect on the productive capability of class 1 and class 2 land in the Westmere study area.
- When the results are mapped a clear trend emerges.
- The groups were displayed in map form to show the location of each property under 3ha. in the Westmere study area.
Refer to map 2
- When the maps of the three groups are combined a distinct pattern emerges.
- Most of the lots under 3ha. are grouped in a corridor north of State Highway 3 between Blueskin and Simpson Roads.
- If new subdivisions (to be finalised) are added to this picture the corridor is intensified.
Refer to map 3
- What this shows is that the residential component initially targeted, is not at issue; rather it is the grouping of properties under 3 ha. in one specific area. This grouping is of a scale and intensity that is inconsistent with the existing pattern of rural production and activities. Therefore the focus of concern should be moved accordingly.
- When the subdivision in the 3 groups and the subdivisions yet to be finalised are graphed by year, it is evident that this trend is relatively new and further intensification is likely.

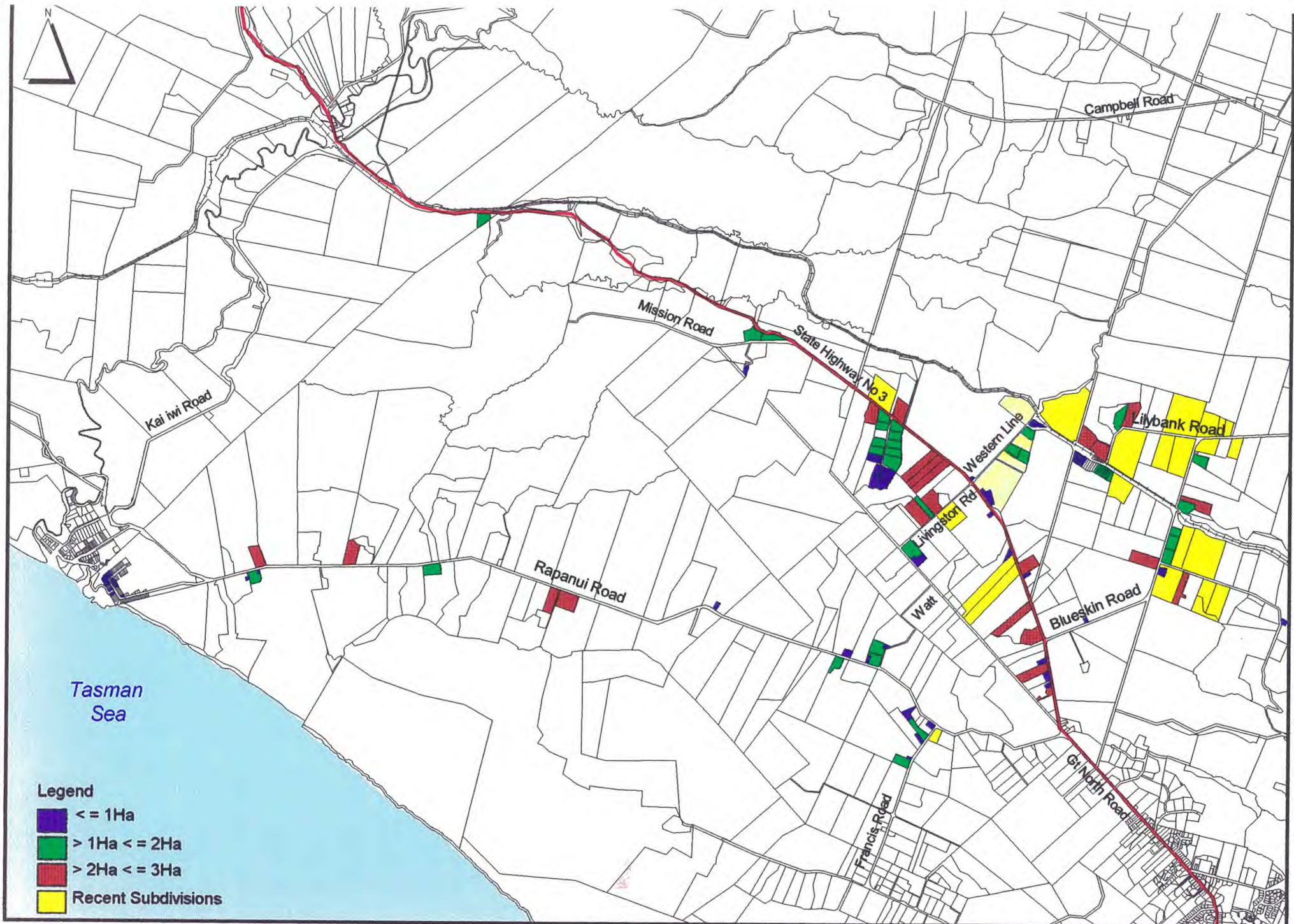
Number of Subdivisions by Year





Legend

- <= 1Ha
- > 1Ha <= 2Ha
- > 2Ha <= 3Ha



Legend

- ≤ 1Ha
- > 1Ha ≤ 2Ha
- > 2Ha ≤ 3Ha
- Recent Subdivisions

7.0 Factors which have Contributed to this Phenomenon

7.1 Market Demand

The type of subdivision occurring is a relatively new phenomenon. As a result, little is known about the reasons why such lot sizes are in demand. The resultant development on these lots has some peculiar characteristics. Lots are usually relatively small (0-2Ha) , with a large house located in the middle of the section. Often some agriculture or horticulture activity uses part of the lot.

7.2

Current policy provisions in the Wanganui District Resource Management Plan Part 3, has the following criteria for subdivision in the Westmere study area:-

Rural B zone

- a) There is no minimum area for subdivision in this zone, the Council preferring to exercise its right of discretion by considering each application separately. Scheme plans of subdivision are required to be accompanied by the following information:-
 - (ii) a description of the present and proposed use or uses of the new lots and the balance of the area;

- b) In determining whether to approve any subdivision in this zone the council requires each application to meet the following criteria:-
 - (ii) the subdivision shall result in an area of land capable of supporting a land based productive use on an independent basis. If the subdivision is for a dwelling house site, Council must be satisfied that there is a need and demand for the creation of a separate lot for the use or that the land is not suitable for land based production.

This allows developers to subdivide down to lot sizes as low as 1 ha or less. However there is no guarantee that the use specified to justify subdivision will eventuate. When the proposed and the actual use of subdivisions were compared it was evident that most subdivisions in the study, justified by the possibility of an intensive productive land use were never developed accordingly.

The results of matching the proposed use with the actual use are as follows:-

Group 1 <=1 ha

	Number	%
Proposed Use = Actual Use	12	60%
Proposed Use ≠ Actual Use	8	40%
Total	20*	100%

Group 2 >1 ha <=2 ha

	Number	%
Proposed Use = Actual Use	8	31%
Proposed Use ≠ Actual Use	18	69%
Total	26*	100%

Group 3 >2 ha <=3 ha

	Number	%
Proposed Use = Actual Use	7	44%
Proposed Use ≠ Actual Use	9	56%
Total	16*	100%

* Some proposed uses could not be found because of the age of the subdivision.(No records)

These results show that generally the proposed use does not equal the actual use. Where the proposed use does equal the actual use the application was usually for a residential property. Where the proposed use does not equal the actual use, productive activities were normally proposed. For example:

	Proposed Use	Actual use	%
Residential*	25	25	100%
Horticulture	30	0	0%

* Most of the subdivision applications proposing a residential use are historical.

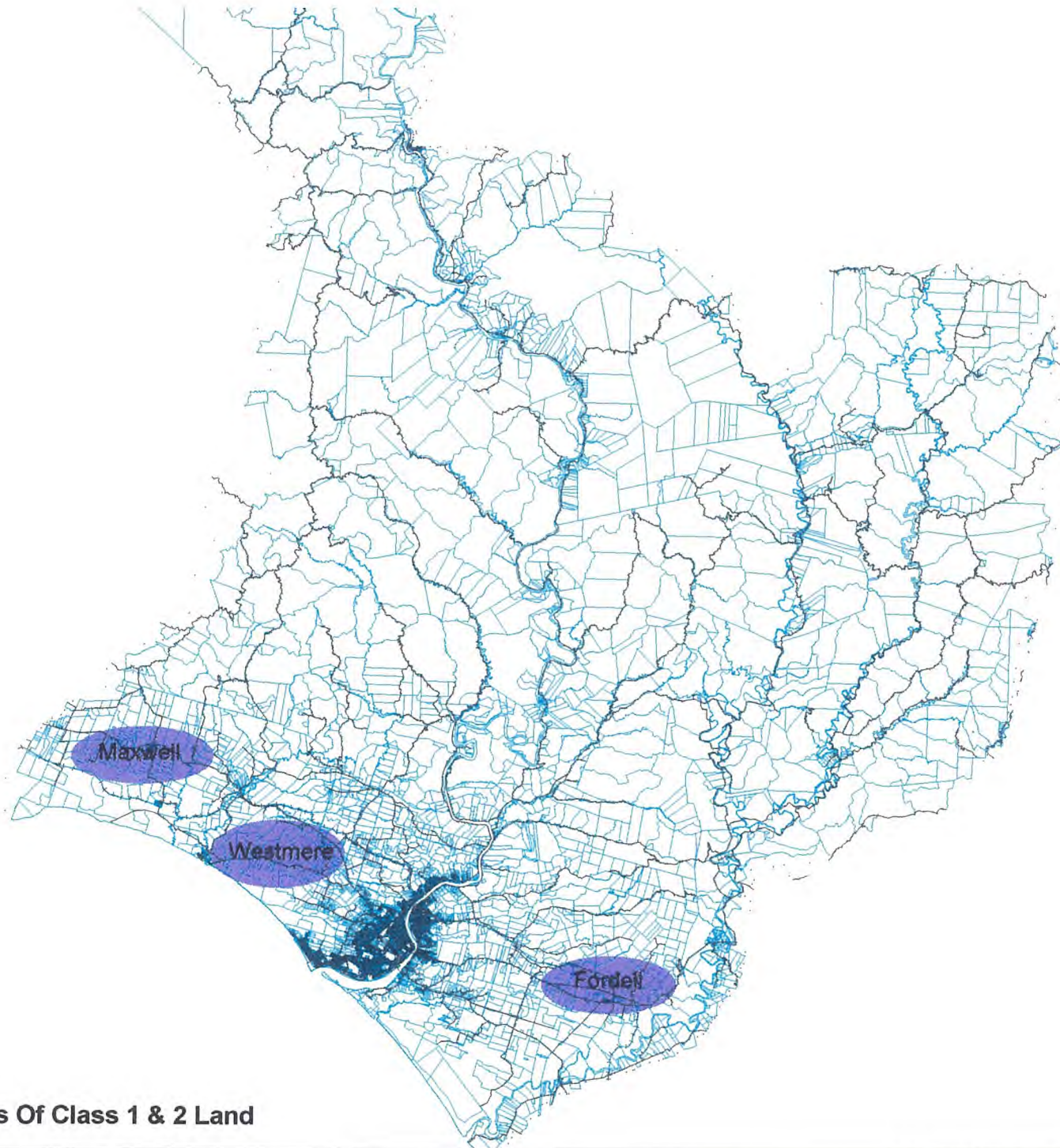
8.0 Analysis**8.1 Are trends emerging over time?**

What has emerged from these results, is that there is a demand for large residential sections in the rural environment. Further this demand appears to be located along a corridor where the character is slowly changing from rural production to a semi- rural settlement (neither rural or urban). While the impact on the loss of productive soil is minimal (these sections represent only 0.6% of total class 1 & class 2 land in the Wanganui District) the wider implications are more serious. The trend is increasing, suggesting that a peak in this type of subdivision will not occur for some time.

8.2 Are there resource management issues to be addressed?

The trend toward a residential corridor appearing in the rural area clearly identifies a gap in policy. The trend raises several serious questions:

1. Is this corridor an isolated occurrence or does it represent a signal that the urban boundary will expand into this region?
2. What infrastructural costs are likely to be generated from the present subdivisions and the probable pressure for more?
3. Does Council envisage an uncontrolled urban boundary, or does it wish to clearly define the urban and rural identity?
4. The level of investment on the dwelling, and the degree of fragmentation of the land holdings would make it difficult to return to a land based productive use in the future. Is it desirable to foreclose future options now?
5. The policy for managing rural subdivision is clearly not working and never envisaged this type of development. Should it be amended so that its original intent can be met?



Main Areas Of Class 1 & 2 Land