

## 7. BOTTLE LAKE FOREST PARK JUNIOR GOLF PROPOSAL

<b>Officer responsible</b> Parks and Waterways Manager	<b>Author</b> Kelly Hansen - Parks and Waterways Planner, DDI 371-1688
Corporate Plan Output: Consents and Plans and Policy Statements 9.4.42	

The purpose of this report is to seek a decision regarding an application to lease an area of land within Bottle Lake Forest Park for a junior golf course and golf practice area.

This report is being referred to the Board to approve or decline the application. Should the Board approve the application then the Parks, Gardens and Waterways Committee will be required to approve the release of the proposed site within Bottle Lake Forest Park from the Selwyn Plantation Board license.

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Bottle Lake Forest Park is a forest park that caters for production forestry and multi-use recreation activity including walking, biking, horse riding and orienteering. Windsor Golf Club is located adjacent to the park and has applied to lease 5.2 hectares of land within the park on which to develop a junior golf course and practice area. The proposed area is north of the park ranger headquarters and opposite the entrance to the Windsor Golf Club

The proposed golf course is being considered in the context of a wider planning exercise for the park headquarters development area, which includes this site. The site is currently leased to Selwyn Plantation Board and is planted in young pine trees. It has been identified in the Bottle Lake Forest Park Management Plan as a future picnic area in a forest theme setting.

A junior golf course is a desirable facility in Christchurch. However, it is not considered that the park is an appropriate site for the junior golf facility as such a facility would displace existing forestry, tracks and wide ranging recreation opportunities. The proposed golf course does not comply with the Bottle Lake Forest Park Management Plan.

### RELEVANT CURRENT POLICY

#### Bottle Lake Forest Park Management Plan

The Bottle Lake Forest Park Management Plan outlines a multi-use strategy for the park. The park is a working forest requiring that recreational use be compatible with the continued productivity of the forest. The existing network of tracks makes good use of the forest and complementary activities such as picnicking have also been provided for in the plan. Recent contact with the community has shown increasing demand for the Council to protect and enhance environmentally valuable sites within the forest. Relevant objectives and policies from the Bottle Lake Forest Park Management Plan are reproduced below.

#### MANAGEMENT GOAL (p. 9)

*To provide for the harmonious management of timber production, special purpose activities, the development of diverse recreation and education experiences and the protection of scenic, ecological and scientific values.*

#### PART IV: FOREST PARK LAND USE

##### 6. FORESTRY (p. 22)

###### Objectives

- *To promote production forestry on a sustained yield basis.*
- *To promote forestry (silvicultural) practices that are compatible with conservation of the soil and the recreational values of the forest area.*

##### 8. RECREATION (p. 28)

- *To provide a range of forest based recreational opportunities compatible with forest management and safety.*
- *To develop recreational facilities in consultation with potential users.*
- *To provide facilities for the needs of public recreation and to design and locate these so as to harmonise with the existing character and landscape values.*
- *To consider recreation in a regional context while taking full cognisance of other facilities which have already been provided by other bodies or which are planned.*

## PART V: DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS (p. 37)

### Objectives

- *To proceed with recreational development in accordance with regional recreational needs.*
- *To ensure the provision of facilities for the public to enhance opportunity for education, recreation and enjoyment.*
- *To ensure that recreational development of all scales, within the park is restricted to areas where the development is compatible with the assigned recreational subzone(s) of the area(s).*
- *To specify in detail, the recreational development proposed for the forest park for the next 10 years.*
- *Policy*
- *To take into account existing opportunities for recreation experience within the region when considering the provision of Park recreation facilities.*

### Recreation and Sport Policy

The Recreation and Sport Policy seeks the following outcomes: *(In alphabetical order)*

1. Children, youth, people with disabilities and people on limited incomes are aware of, have access to and are increasing their participation in a broad range of recreation and sporting activities.
2. Christchurch residents are aware of and have access to a broad range of recreation and sporting activities.
3. Christchurch is widely recognised for hosting successful local, regional, national and international recreation and sports events and festivals.
4. Consultation with the Christchurch community, recreation and sport participants and service providers is ongoing and effective.
5. Physical assets meet the identified and viable recreation and sport needs of Christchurch and minimum legal standards.
6. Recreation and sport is making a positive contribution to the city's economy.
7. Research into the existing and future recreation and sport needs and trends of Christchurch is ongoing and findings are taken into account in the planning and provision of all services, facilities and programmes.
8. Resources are allocated and services, facilities and programmes are delivered efficiently, effectively and equitably.
9. Services, facilities and programmes meet the recreation and sporting needs of the Christchurch community, particularly its children and youth, and also its people with disabilities and people with limited incomes.
10. Services, facilities and programmes complement and enhance the City's unique character and environment.
11. Volunteers are acknowledged and supported.

Services have been prioritised by the Council in the Recreation and Sport Policy, the allocation of resources to the higher priority recreational services is to be considered before resources are allocated to those of lower priority. First priority services (more than 90% support) include parks and sports grounds. Golf courses are included in the third priority category (less than 46% support).

### Draft Recreation and Sport Strategy

A Draft Recreation and Sport Strategy is currently in its consultation phase. The draft strategy is focussed on physical activity and active recreation. The goals of this strategy are:

1. Develop a safe physical environment that encourages participation in recreation and sport.
2. Provide a wide range of recreation and sport activities that are made available to all citizens of Christchurch and Canterbury.
3. Make the public aware of recreation and sport programmes and motivate them to take part.
4. Recreation and sport providers are effective and working together in a co-ordinated manner.
5. Talented performers are nurtured and given the opportunity to maximise their potential.
6. All major funding bodies are co-ordinated and aligned with the Recreation and Sport strategy.

### THE PROPOSAL

Windsor Golf Club has applied to develop a five hole course for junior golfers and a practice area which could be used by all ages for learning and practising strokes. The proposed site is adjacent to Windsor Golf Club within the park.

A junior golf course is desired because it would be better suited to children's strength and ability and safer than using the existing golf course at the same time as other more experienced golfers.

Windsor Golf Club currently has a structured junior golf development programme to actively promote and encourage the involvement of Christchurch's youth and has 61 children registered with the club. The club aims to become the home of junior golf in Canterbury. The proposed junior golf facilities would be utilised as part of Windsor's development programme, as well as for the running of open junior tournaments. The course would be aimed at ages 13 years and under and beginners up to 17 years. Work is currently being undertaken with schools in the area to promote the game of golf.

## **ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION**

### **Bottle Lake Forest Park values**

The park is located approximately 10 km north east of central Christchurch, adjacent to the coast. The park provides a unique forest experience unavailable elsewhere in Christchurch. It consists of over 800 hectares of mostly *Pinus radiata* planted on coastal sand dunes. The close proximity of this forested area to the central city and surrounding districts has attracted increasing numbers of visitors so that recreation now constitutes a major use of the forest. Changes in availability of leisure time and types of recreational pursuits have also led to an increase in recreational demand on the park. Estimated annual visitor numbers are 350,000, an increase from 250,000 in 1999. Yet the recreation potential of the forest is still largely unrealised. More than 400 children visited the park as part of the Leisure Unit's holiday programme in September alone. Most of the children had not visited the site before and did not even know it existed.

The combined area of the forest is five times the size of Hagley Park, and as such forms an important asset to metropolitan Christchurch. The expansive forest areas have a character of remoteness and tranquillity that provide a contrast to other more developed open space areas of the city.

The size of the forest allows a diverse range of activities to occur. Walking, running, mountain biking (night and day), horse riding, orienteering, picnicking, off road vehicles, dog exercising and holiday programmes are just some of the recreational activities catered for. As these are mostly informal activities without a supporting club structure, participation rates are not available for comparison with golf figures. However, it should be noted that walking is New Zealand's top physical activity for both adult men (59%) and women (80%) and also rates highly for young people. Running or jogging also rates highly at 16% for men and 10% for women and mountain biking rates at 10% for men.

### **Triple Bottom Line - Social, Environmental and Financial Implications**

There is a recognised need for diversity in the size and type of open space and facilities provided by the Council to cater for personal recreation preferences, different levels of ability, and to meet the needs of the community. More variety in both the visual appearance and functions performed by parks and open space is needed to recognise and promote the distinct character of each park. This park provides the opportunity for people to participate in activities and experiences not available in a conventional park, thereby increasing the diversity and functions of parks in Christchurch.

There are currently 17 golf courses in Christchurch, three of which are on Council owned land, one being managed by the Council. A further golf course is proposed in Heathcote Valley. There are also five golf driving ranges in Christchurch. Specific golf facilities for junior players are available at Coringa golf course at McLeans Island. There are two sizeable existing golf courses immediately adjacent to the proposed junior golf site.

In planning for the park, all potential users should be considered and future needs taken into account. The proposed junior golf course is well located for Windsor Golf Club. However, the needs of informal and casual recreational users of the park also need to be considered. This is more difficult to achieve as most of the walkers, runners, mountain bikers and other casual users of the park do not have the voice of an organised body representing their views.

The park is a natural resource which plays an important role in the well-being of the community and the provision of recreation opportunities. The wilderness nature of the park is expected to become ever more precious as urban growth continues to increase around it. The carrying capacity of the park is limited by space. Nibbling away at the edges of the forest park with alternative land use will reduce the area available for general public use. The social impact and potential conflict between golf and forest recreation activities needs to be considered.

The park headquarters area is the most intensive development scenario planned for the park. A series of picnic areas will each have a distinctive vegetative theme. Development of visitor services in this area will have an effect on use of the forest which in turn will influence further complementary developments in the park headquarters area. The proposed junior golf site is the most northern segment of the park headquarters area and currently has a horse trail going through it. The management plan shows this as future picnic areas with labelled arboretum trails. Existing forestry is expected to be felled in approximately 24 plus years' time. Leasing the area for a junior golf course would need to be publicly notified as this varies significantly from what is proposed in the management plan.

The park is part of a green corridor stretching from the Waimakariri River through Brooklands Lagoon, the Styx River, Bottle Lake Forest, Travis Wetland, the Avon River and Estuary to the Port Hills. The establishment and maintenance of connections through the coastal green corridor is intended to foster ecological, recreational, cultural and heritage links through the open space of eastern Christchurch.

The proposed junior golf site is zoned Rural 1 (Coastal) in the City Plan. Soils within this zone are prone to erosion and are generally unsuitable for sustaining intensive cultivation. In order to maintain and enhance soil resources, forestry activities are encouraged. A golf course would require ongoing irrigation.

The park site was clear felled and replanted mostly in 2000 with one hectare of older trees planted in 1989. The area would need to be removed from the forestry licence in order for the golf course to be developed. A compensation payment of \$10,069, as assessed by the Selwyn Plantation Board for the loss of the existing plantation, would be payable to the Board by Windsor Golf Club as per the requirements of the licence agreement between the Christchurch City Council and the Selwyn Plantation Board. Neighbouring landowners have not been approached to explore other potential sites for a junior golf facility.

Windsor Golf Club has proposed a five year implementation plan to develop the park site. The cost of development and maintenance of the proposed golf course would be met by Windsor Golf Club at no cost to the Council.

The lease terms for the site would be negotiated by the Property Manager in consultation with the Parks and Waterways Policy and Leasing Administrator. A green fee charge of approximately \$2 is expected to be set for use of the junior golf course. Currently the forest experience is publicly available free of charge.

## **INPUT FROM THE LEISURE UNIT SPORTS ADVISOR**

### **Golf in Canterbury and Christchurch**

The Hillary Commission ranks golf highly in the participation rates for adult men (26%) and women (9%) but not for young people. In Canterbury, participation rates have been growing for men while women's participation rates have remained relatively constant.

There were 11,500 registered golfers in the Christchurch area in 2000/01 which is significantly more than many other major sports such as netball, soccer and rugby in terms of numbers. However, there are many more casual players who are not registered members of clubs but play casually on weekends or after work which would significantly swell the overall playing numbers.

Whilst golf may be considered an expensive sport for juniors to participate in, on average it costs about the same to buy a set of golf clubs as it does to buy a set of inline hockey gear, tennis racquets or a cricket bat and equipment. Many clubs offer large discounts for juniors, students, unwaged and also family membership discounts. Alternatively one can hire equipment and pay green fees on an as needed basis to circumvent the need for the initial outlay. The advent of public courses and availability of cheap equipment has done a lot to dispel the label of "elitism" sometimes associated with the game of golf.

One advantage that golf has over other sports is that it has a structure which easily fits with the current demands for sport and recreation participation by people today – the need to be able to turn up and pay/play when you like then go home – with no other organisational or voluntary commitments such as being a coach, running the club or fundraising etc.

Golf's popularity will always be strong because of the media coverage it gets, the role models that children have (Tiger Woods for example) and the fact that there are a number of playing options – alone, socially and competitive and one can play from a very young age right through life.

### **Provision of Golf for Juniors and the Windsor Golf Club application.**

All the above factors have contributed to the popularity of the sport in New Zealand. New Zealand has a high ratio of golf courses per head of population with more being planned all over the country. This is an indication of the popularity of the game over a long period of time. There will always be peaks and troughs in participation but overall the trend is toward a continued increase in players. However, there is a distinct lack of facilities built specifically for junior children. A four hole junior course exists at Coringa golf course and is deemed to be very successful. However, Coringa Golf course is a long way from Windsor golf course and travel of this distance would be a major constraint for many parents of potential juniors who live on the eastern side of the City. Golf administrators have realised that the future of the sport is in the strength of the juniors playing and the current application is an attempt to begin to address this need.

Any coaching or teaching manual will tell the reader of the need to provide an environment for the beginner that will give a number of tasks with a steady progressive increase in level of difficulty so as to ensure success at an early stage of learning. This is especially true for children and is the intention of the proposed short course from Windsor Golf club. There are a good number of junior coaching programmes being run at the golf clubs, schools and as holiday programmes but a purpose built course would greatly enhance these programmes and provide the intermediate step between learning the skills and playing on a full sized course.

Currently, young beginner golfers must play on full sized courses built for adults with adult-sized tees, greens, fairways and holes. A full sized course is a long way to expect a young child to walk – let alone hit a ball. The development, as proposed by the Windsor Club, would provide an important asset in the development of junior golf in Christchurch. It would provide a place where children who have learnt some of the basic skills could experience the actual playing of the game under conditions that will ensure they do experience success early in their learning which will maximize the chance of them taking the game up permanently.

### **Input from other Agencies:**

#### *Sport Canterbury*

Among many other programmes, Sport Canterbury are heavily involved in provision of sporting and recreation activities for children, especially through the kiwisport programme. Kiwigolf is seen as one of the more popular sports taught. A purpose-built junior course would be well utilised within this programme and would provide an excellent stepping stone for young participants/learners from the closed controlled practice environment to the much more difficult and open environment of a full-sized adult golf course.

#### *Canterbury Golf Association*

The Windsor Golf Club's application contains letters of support from various agencies including the Canterbury Golf Association via the Junior Development Officer who is very supportive and sees the benefits of such a course and the opportunity to hold training and tournaments for young players.

### **Summary**

While the park is considered an important asset to the people of Christchurch and the management plans are developed for good reason, each application for usage of such assets should be considered for its merits and where sufficient justification for an alternative use for a park can be shown then this application should be given due consideration.

## RESULTS OF CONSULTATION

### External

A brief survey of 95 park users was undertaken in September 2001 to gauge response to planned developments in the park headquarters area.

There was strong support to retain a wilderness forest theme for the park:

- 93 respondents in support.
- One respondent neutral.
- One respondent opposed.

There was a mixed response to the proposed junior golf facilities:

- 38 respondents supported the junior golf course proposal.
- 51 respondents were neutral or opposed to the proposal.
- Six respondents provided no answer.

There was strong support for picnic facilities:

- 74 respondents in support.
- 13 respondents neutral.
- Six respondents opposed.

An arboretum was also popular:

- 56 respondents in support.
- 27 respondents neutral.
- Two respondents opposed.

A separate survey undertaken at the same time found that of 143 respondents 82% were regular visitors, 6% were occasional visitors, and 12% were first time visitors.

### Internal

The junior golf proposal has been well debated by staff from both the Leisure Unit and Parks and Waterways Unit. The recommendation below is supported by both Units.

### CONCLUSION

The Windsor Golf Club has been successful in developing a junior golf programme which is continuing to grow. Junior golf facilities located nearby would further enhance their programme. However, Bottle Lake Forest Park is not considered a suitable location for a junior golf facility because golf is not aligned with the values of the park. Demands on the park are increasing and it is not appropriate to displace other public recreation opportunities with a junior golf facility. Alternative options for developing the junior golf facilities therefore need to be explored.

**Recommendation:** That Bottle Lake Forest Park not be approved as a site for Windsor Golf Club's proposed junior golf course and golf practice area.

### Chairperson's

**Recommendations:**

1. That the abovementioned recommendation be adopted.
2. That the Board explore alternative ways to support junior golf in the area.