

6. QUEEN ELIZABETH II DRIVE POPLAR TREES

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Corporate Plan Output: Roading System Maintenance 9.4.48	

The purpose of this report is to seek a decision regarding the proposed removal of poplar trees along QEII Drive this financial year.

CONTEXT OF REPORT

Over the past five to six years, a number of complaints have been received regarding the shadow cast onto nearby properties by the large Chinese poplars on the south side of Queen Elizabeth II Drive between Burwood Road and the Shirley Golf Course. Some of the original planting of poplars along QEII Drive has been removed for various reasons such as storm damage and poor form. At the end of 2000 following further complaints, staff from the Parks and Waterways and City Streets Units met to consider how the problem might be best dealt with.

No progress has been able to be made on this issue in the last year, because of a number of constraints. Funding had not been sourced, either for removal of the poplars or for replacement planting. Staff movement, resulting from the restructuring of the Parks and Waterways Unit, also led to the stalling of progress with this issue.

With the approach of winter, and in anticipation of complaints of shading from the poplars, the issue is being readdressed. Funding has been now sourced within the City Streets budget to remove the poplars in the current financial year. No funding has however been sourced for replacement planting. A decision has been made by City Streets to re-grass the bare areas and to increase the maintenance of the grassed and planted areas on the mounds.

Transit New Zealand is due to take over the management and maintenance of QEII Drive and the road reserve within the next three years. An enhancement scheme can then be negotiated with Transit New Zealand.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Removal of all of the mature Chinese poplars along the southern edge of QEII Drive is proposed in response to ongoing complaints of shading onto nearby properties. Replanting is not proposed at this time.

RELEVANT CURRENT POLICY

- Trees - Powers delegated to the Community Board are as follows:
 - The planting and removal of trees on parks.
 - To adjudicate on the removal or retention of significant healthy trees in consultation with any Units affected, and contentious matters relating to the planting of trees on any reserve or land administered by the Parks and Waterways Unit except the following:
 - Any trees protected by the City Plan (resource consent procedure required).
 - Trees immediately dangerous to persons or property, subject to the Chairperson of the relevant Community Board being advised of any removals.
 - Trees currently causing or likely to cause immediate significant damage to buildings, services or property whether public or privately owned.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSAL

Tree removal, retention, replacement planting and landscape development

All of the large Chinese poplars along the southern side of QEII Drive are proposed for removal by the end of June 2002. The bare and mounded areas of the road reserve will be sown with grass seed this winter, and maintenance of this area will be increased.

ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

The Chinese poplars, are a quick growing species. Tim Rillstone, Arborist with the Parks and Waterways Unit, suggests that these poplar trees were planted along QEII Drive for quick effect as feature trees some 14 years ago, with an intention to remove them after about ten to 15 years, as other vegetation established. Vegetation has since established on the berm and inside many of the properties and the purpose of the poplars has long since been fulfilled.

Several enquiries to assess progress with the proposed poplar removal have been made during the last year. Recently, residents of Lakewood Terrace, along the back edge of the south side of QEII Drive, have again been enquiring on progress towards removal of the poplars.

RESULTS OF CONSULTATION

Consultation with residents was undertaken in January 2001. A questionnaire was distributed to a total of 60 residents living on the southern side of QEII Drive from the corner of Burwood Road in the east, taking in those residents living between the northern side of Lakewood Drive, Yellowstone Crescent, and Michigan Place (which adjoins the Shirley Golf Club) fronting on to QEII Drive. It was considered that the questionnaire would enable the concerns of the residents to be identified, and their wishes could then be conveyed to the Council.

The questionnaire offered a range of four proposals. Common to all of the proposals was the removal of poplars. Option one proposed removing all the poplars and replacing them. Option two, three and four proposed removing of "offending poplars" with variations in the proposals related to replanting options.

Twenty-three residents returned the questionnaire. As well as indicating their preference, residents requested improved maintenance of the berm including collection of rubbish, pruning and removal of shrubbery adjacent to fences to 2 metres to reduce shading, and measures to reduce tagging of the fence, and noise from the road.

Two Lakewood Drive residents specifically identified their properties as being affected by the poplars, while two residents of Michigan Place were specific about not wanting trees removed by their properties.

Sixty percent of the responses indicated a preference for option three. This option proposed *"immediately removing the existing offending poplars, and planting the whole mounded grass area with low growing and low maintenance natives"*, after the style of planting on the QEII Drive and Fairway Park subdivision boundary (which was serviced with irrigation during its establishment).

Staff currently involved with trying to progress this issue view the original questionnaire as problematic. "Offending poplars" have not been specifically identified. Furthermore an option proposed, and subsequently favoured *"immediately removing the existing offending poplars, and planting the whole mounded grass area with low growing and low maintenance natives"*, is a significant expense for which no funding is currently budgeted and the view is also that in time this planting is likely to cause significant shading of properties. The proposed transfer of the management of QEII Drive to Transit New Zealand within three years' time, is a further constraint to the City Streets Unit's commitment to replacement planting.

An update letter advising residents that the matter is being reported to the Board at the 27 May meeting has been circulated to residents in Lakewood Drive, Yellowstone Crescent, and Michigan Place (which adjoins the Shirley Golf Club) during the week ending Saturday 11 May. A plan identifying the poplar trees causing shading, which are proposed for removal, was enclosed, as well as a response form. Residents were asked to indicate on the form if they endorse or are opposed to the proposal to remove the poplars causing shading (as identified on the plan) and return it in the reply paid envelope no later than 22 May 2002. The outcome of this will be presented along with the report. Initial indications are that the majority of respondents are supporting the proposal.

CONCLUSIONS

Removal of all large poplars should be undertaken as soon as possible to satisfy those residents who consistently complain about shading. Replacement planting is not seen as appropriate at this time and should be negotiated with Transit New Zealand in three years when the maintenance and management of the road reserve is transferred.

- Recommendations:**
1. That the information be received.
 2. That the Board approve the removal of all of the Chinese poplars on the southern edge of QEII Drive between Burwood Road and the Shirley Golf Club, subject to the results of the survey favouring removal.

Chairperson's Recommendation: That the abovementioned recommendations be adopted.