

9. RICHMOND HILL PURCHASE

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The purpose of this report is to seek the support of the Board for a park purchase of some 284 ha of Port Hills rural land on Richmond Hill. (Refer also to clause 17 in the Public Excluded section of this agenda.)

INTRODUCTION

The Richmond Hill property covers an area of approximately 331 ha on the hills above Moncks Bay, Clifton and Sumner. The land is extensively farmed, with part of the lower property formerly managed as a private golf course. A reference to rezone a further 27 ha of land Living Hills on the old golf course area is currently before the Environment Court.



View from Richmond Hill Farm across Pegasus bay

CITY PLAN

In 1995 the proposed plan was publicly notified and provided for an additional 10 ha of Living Hills zoning adjoining the existing residential area on Richmond Hill. The Council Decision No. 136 rezoned a further six hectares from Rural Hills to Living HA (deferred). The deferment over the additional six hectares would be lifted once the Council had acquired the remainder of the property, an area of approximately 300 ha.

The Council's decision was appealed by the Greenwood Estate, who sought relief that the Living Hills Zone be extended over a further 27 ha or, alternatively, that all of its land currently shown on the planning map as LHA and LHA (deferred) be zoned LHA with no deferment.

The Canterbury Regional Council, Sumner Residents' Association, Clifton Neighbourhood Committee and several others gave notice under section 271A of the Resource Management Act that they wished to appear as parties to these proceedings.

The parties, including the Council, have entered into negotiations regarding this reference. A draft sale and purchase agreement has been negotiated which will result in some 284 ha of land being acquired by the Council. A further 25 ha adjoining the LHA Zone will be retained by the owners and Zoned Rural H, with the proviso that should the owners decide to sell the land the Council has reserved the first right of refusal to acquire the area.

OPEN SPACE CONTEXT

Richmond Hill is the last major area of rural land left outside the parks network in the Sumner area. The proposed purchase will link Scarborough Hill Park with Barnett Park and Sumner, Clifton and Richmond Hills with the Summit Road and Conservation Estate above the harbour basin.

NATURAL VALUES

Richmond Hill Farm has a plant cover of silver tussock, native herbs and exotic pasture plants, a legacy of at least 600 years of human modification of the natural environment. Two small clusters of the natural forest cover of the area are still found within the proposed park purchase area. Trees such as kowhai, narrow leaved lacebark and ngaio can be found in these natural fragments, which are now rare on the outer rim of the Lyttelton Volcano above the City.

The property contains at least five natural sites of ecological importance to the City. Included within the purchase are the majority of the areas of two top level "A" sites. "A" sites are the top rated natural areas in the City. Natural sites are ranked on an A (top) to E (lowest) rating system based on factors such as percentage cover of native plants, naturalness, rarity, area and biodiversity. One "A" site is situated around Windsor Castle, a prominent midslope rock outcrop, and the other encompasses a large gully to the western side of the proposed subdivision. The gully "A" site contains at least 22 native plant species, whereas the Windsor Castle site is notable for its native herb and rock flora on the rocky escarpment on its northeast and east sides.

RECREATION OPPORTUNITY

Richmond Hill Farm has traditionally been used at the discretion of the owners by local and city users for public recreation activities such as walking. This privilege has been dependant on the goodwill of the owners and cannot necessarily be expected to continue with new owners should the property be retained in private ownership.

The higher reaches of the farm above Windsor Castle offer opportunities for relatively easy graded walkways and mountain bike routes through good quality tussock grassland with excellent views over Sumner, Moncks Bay, the Estuary and Pegasus Bay to the Kaikoura Mountains.

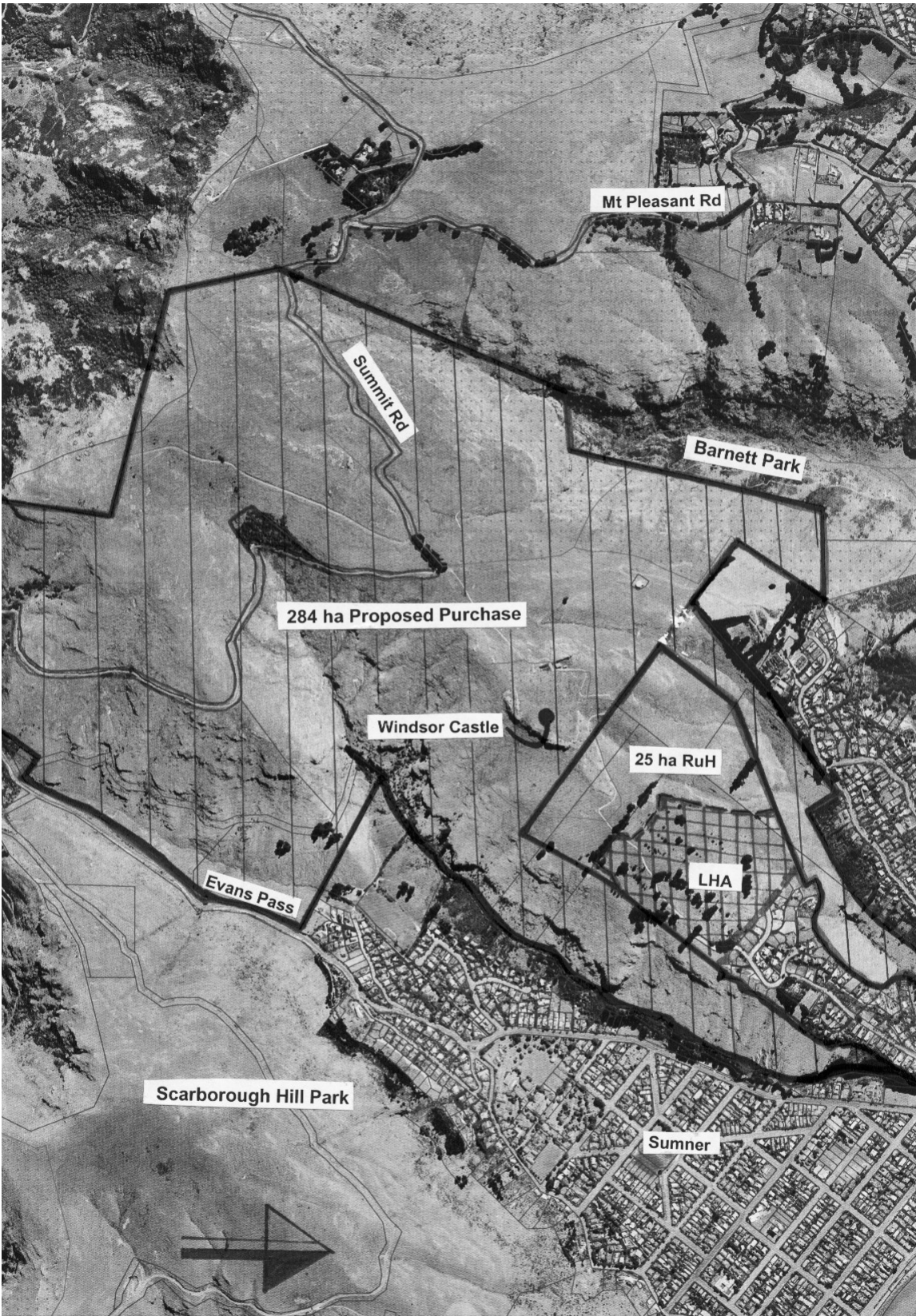
PORT HILLS ACQUISITIONS STRATEGY

In April 1999 the Council approved the Port Hills Regional Park Acquisitions Strategy. This policy document proposed that the Council acquire land on the Port Hills to provide multiple environmental, landscape and recreation values for the growing City and visitors. Key concepts included in the Strategy include City skyline protection, landscape integration, ecological sustainability, conservation, water quality and catchment enhancement, recreation opportunity and historical and cultural values.

The proposed land purchase falls within the proposed Regional Park area and fulfils the majority of the above criteria.

THE PURCHASE AREA

The 284 ha acquisition will provide long term protection for the majority of the remaining upper Port Hills in the Sumner area, and the lower gullies on both sides of Richmond Hill. The further 25 ha adjoining the LHA Zone to be retained by the owners and Zoned Rural H includes a portion of the Windsor Castle ecological site. However the agreement provides the Council with the first right of purchase should the owners choose to sell, as well as giving it the use of the land up until that time.



NATURAL + PEOPLE + ECONOMIC STEP ASSESSMENT

#	CONDITION:	Meets condition ✓✓0*	HOW IT HELPS MEET CONDITION:
The Natural Step			
N1	Reduce non-renewable resource use	0	
N2	Eliminate emission of harmful substances	x	
N3	Protect and restore biodiversity and ecosystems	✓✓	Protect native plants, animals & ecosystems
N4	People needs met fairly and efficiently	NA	NA - See People Step + Economic Step
The People Step			
P1	Basic needs met	✓	Need for healthy exercise opportunity
P2	Full potential developed	✓✓	Stress release, enjoyment of open space, views, nature
P3	Social capital enhanced	✓✓	Opportunity for group and family recreation
P4	Culture and identity protected	✓✓	Natural city identity reinforced, history protected, skyline protected
P5	Governance and participatory democracy strengthened	✓✓	References before Environment Court Resolved
The Economic Step			
E1	Effective and efficient use of all resources	✓✓	Wise use and management of natural resources
E2	Job rich local economy	✓	Potential opportunity for non invasive concession activity
E3	Financial sustainability	✓	Contribute to attractiveness of city as visitor destination

Source of Funds

Strategic Reserves Purchases Funding is \$888,200 for the current financial year. Of this amount a total of \$840,000 has been committed towards Halswell Quarry Park, Scarborough Farm Park and this acquisition if approved.

We therefore have three options.

1. Pay a part payment this year (02/03) of \$400,000 and the balance in (03/04) year for which sufficient funds have been provided. If this option is adopted then interest would be payable on the balance outstanding from the date of settlement until 1 July 2003.
2. If the Scarborough Farm purchase does not proceed then these funds could be redirected towards this purchase.
3. If it is proposed to bring forward the (03/04) funding then a Council resolution will be required.

It is however not believed necessary to make a decision at this point in time because it is too early to determine when title will be available and settlement effected. When the position becomes clearer a report on the respective alternatives will be prepared for consideration.

Conclusion

Purchase of the Richmond Hill property will prevent further urban expansion on the upper Port Hills in the Sumner area beyond Windsor Castle. It will provide protection for the City's high quality ecological areas and provide excellent opportunities for public recreation. Views from the purchase area are of high quality, which will be preserved and protected for all time.

The purchase will assist in the resolution of the references before the Environment Court and provide long term certainty as to the future of the Upper Port Hills.

Staff

Recommendation: That the Board recommend to the Parks, Gardens and Waterways Committee that the property be acquired subject to the terms and conditions contained in the public excluded section of this report.

Chairperson's

Recommendation: That the recommendation be adopted.