

8. MT PLEASANT PROPERTY PURCHASE

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PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to consider the purchase of 7.5 hectares of land on Mt Pleasant for reserve purposes as part of the Council's overall Port Hills Regional Park Acquisition Strategy.

LAND DESCRIPTION

The proposed 7.5 ha is depicted on the attached plan, being Lot 3 DP 321545 and is situated on the north west face of Mt Pleasant Peak. It covers an altitudinal range from about the 400m contour to approximately the 480m. The lower part of the property fronts the Summit Road, the eastern side fronts Broadleaf Lane and the southern side Lyttelton Scenic Reserve and Mt Pleasant Scenic Reserve.

The land consists of a generally north west slope with relatively gentle grades in its upper areas. All the land is in tussock covered pasture.

OPEN SPACE CONTEXT

The property is bounded on three sides by public reserves, namely Mt Pleasant and Lyttelton Scenic reserves to the south, Scotts Valley Reserve to the north west below the Summit Road and the Britten Reserve to the north east. It is effectively the hub connecting all of the surrounding reserves.

Good access is available to the property from Broadleaf lane which connects the Summit road to the top of Mt Pleasant and the Summit Road car park on the east side of Mt Cavendish.

RECREATION USER POTENTIAL and BENEFITS

The owner of the property is already admonishing individuals and groups who use his land to gain access to the adjoining reserves, often without asking permission. The main recreation benefit that the property offers is an opportunity to form alternative off road routes and short loop trips between Mt Pleasant and the adjoining reserves.

ECOLOGICAL VALUES

The property covers the majority of Ecological Heritage Site 28.07. Ecological Heritage Sites (EHS's) are the city's highest graded natural areas and have been given some protection under the City Plan. This particular EHS is notable for the quality of its tussock grassland. It is one of a number of high value Port Hills sites representative of tussock land situated on well drained Evans steep land soil derived from volcanic colluvium. Its current excellent state is largely due to the responsible management of the current owner.

BENEFITS OF CITY MANAGING EHS'S AND PORT HILLS LANDSCAPE

Over the last 50 odd years the health of the Port Hills tussock grassland has been dependant on the management skills of the private landowners. Many landowners built up extensive expertise in the specialized area of tussock grassland management. However many of these people are now selling up and moving elsewhere as management and land use options for the Port Hills change. Options for managing the grasslands are becoming more difficult as these experienced operators leave.

The protection of Port Hills landscapes is now largely falling to the City, which is continuing to build up skills in grassland management, both at an on the ground level through the Port Hills Rangers and through its own botanical/ agricultural advisors and consultants. The City has a unique advantage in grassland management in that the social and environmental objectives of owning land can be given greater weight than the commercial imperative to financially gain from farming. Which is not to say that grazing should not be profitable, however the City's main emphasis can be on maintaining the cultural values of the Port Hills as a backdrop to the City, recreation values and maintaining a refuge for indigenous Christchurch nature.

Protection of the Port Hills iconic nature is much more than City Plan policy and rules. It requires cost effective and skilled on the ground management, preferably over extensive areas, to provide easier stock management, better control of weed and animal pests, and greater likelihood of consistent landscape appearance. Inclusion of the 7.5 ha into the Council's reserve framework will make management more effective, and put the management of recreation users fairly into the public arena, rather than leaving private landowners with the responsibility of managing public recreation issues.

MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS OF COUNCIL OWNERSHIP

Access to the property for maintenance is very good. The block currently has low noxious weed presence, therefore initial maintenance costs will be very low, basically consisting of eradicating isolated weed regrowth. Maintenance will be by grazing which would be licensed out to an appropriate grazer. Overall management costs are anticipated to be nominal, because this small block is easily incorporated into the wider management requirements of the surrounding reserves. In the longer term, say 5-10 years, increased maintenance costs will only occur if further development, such as new formed tracks occur, and this will be dependant on public demand.

The property contains a 121,500 litre concrete water reservoir which has been cut into the bedrock, is barely visible and is rainfall fed. The reservoir has good access and has some benefit for fire fighting purposes, but is not regarded as essential by the Council's Rural Fire Officer. The reservoir is currently fenced but will need to be made secure for health and safety reasons should the Council purchase the property.

CAPITAL COSTS

As a requirement of purchase the Council would be required to fence the boundary between the vendor and the new reserve, and half share the fencing costs with the vendor along Broadleaf Lane.

ZONING

The property is zoned Conservation 1 under the proposed City of Christchurch District Plan as notified in 1999.

SOURCE OF FUNDS

Sufficient funds are held under Strategic Reserve Purchases Page 9.4.72 to complete the purchase this financial year.

SETTLEMENT

The property has been offered to the Council by the owners at a sum assessed on their behalf by Quotable Value New Zealand Limited, Registered Public Valuers. The sum assessed is comparable to the prices paid by the Council some years ago for the Britten and Scotts Valley Reserves and also reflects its strategic importance in tying together four reserves. The details of the settlement are included in the Public Excluded section of this report.

CONCLUSION

The offer of the 7.5 ha of land provides the Council with an opportunity to obtain a high quality piece of tussock grassland and improve the linking together of four public reserves. It will also improve potential for a wider range of short walks in the vicinity of Mt Pleasant Summit.

Staff

Recommendation: That the Council resolve to acquire Lot 3 DP 321545 being part of the land in Certificate of Title 481/101 and containing 7.4980 hectares subject to the terms and conditions included in the Public Excluded section of this report.

Chairman's

Recommendation: That the above recommendation be adopted.