

6. RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT ON HIGH QUALITY SOIL

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The purpose of this report is to consider a submission on the above issue by the Riccarton/Wigram Community Board on the Council's 2004 Financial Plan and Programme. The Annual Plan Working Party referred the submission to this Committee.

INTRODUCTION

The Riccarton/Wigram Community Board submission to the Annual Plan Working Party expressed apprehension at the encouragement of rural residential subdivision on quality agricultural and horticultural land surrounding the city. Concern was also expressed about pressure on the Council to "supply all amenities associated with city living" and "the continuing practice of cross boundary infrastructural development" compromising infrastructure within the city.

HIGH QUALITY SOILS

The effects of residential development on resources such as soils is a matter to be dealt with in district plans (and City Plan) in a manner consistent with promoting the purpose of the Resource Management Act (RMA).

High quality soils are a resource in terms of the Act but unlike its predecessor, the Town and Country Planning Act 1977, the RMA does not place any particular emphasis on the need to protect these soils over and above other natural resources. The decision as to whether or not high quality soils should be protected from residential development involves consideration of a wide range of potentially conflicting objectives, and an overall judgement needs to be made.

In the Proposed City Plan objectives and policies, tend to support the retention of (versatile) soils and the rules governing rural subdivision are partly directed towards this aim. However, these objectives and policies do not preclude the possibility of versatile soils being urbanised if there is sufficient resource management justification to do so. Several hundred hectares were rezoned for housing in the City Plan as amended by decisions (1999) on the basis that there was little or no other option to provide the extra land needed for housing, in accordance with the Plan's urban consolidation objective.

LIFESTYLE BLOCKS AND AMENITIES

The Proposed City Plan does not exclude lifestyle blocks in the rural area, but does try to limit the loss of versatile soils through rules on site coverage and minimum lot size. These provisions also aim to reduce the risk of groundwater contamination from septic tanks - arguably a greater resource issue than versatile soils.

Some amenities (reticulated sewer and water) have had to be provided in some instances by the Council to overcome a potential health risk. Some rural roads may also need to be upgraded in the future to take the extra traffic but such investment could be needed for other reasons, eg more tourism traffic, forestry development.

CROSS BOUNDARY EFFECTS

The Council has little, if any, influence over the growth in lifestyle blocks in adjoining districts, other than when their district plans or plan changes are notified. For example, submissions have been made by Christchurch City in the Proposed Selwyn District Plan seeking that controls over rural subdivision near the City/District boundary reinforce the city's own policies.

CONCLUSION

The matters raised in the Board's submission concerning the protection of versatile soils and effects of lifestyle blocks have been acknowledged as resource management issues in the Proposed City Plan. There are objectives, policies and rules to manage these effects but any additional controls over rural lifestyle blocks would require a plan change.

Staff

Recommendation: That the information be received.

Chairman's

Recommendation: For discussion.