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Corporate Plan Output: Strategic Reserve Purchases	

The purpose of this report is to seek approval to acquire a strategic Port Hills property as a scenic reserve within the Heathcote Valley. The proposal was considered and supported by the Hagley/Ferrymead Community Board at its meeting on 4 August 1999.

BACKGROUND

Mr Scott the owner of a large property within the Heathcote Valley has offered to sell to the Council 131 ha adjoining Castle Rock Reserve to the Council.

The property forms the hills back drop to the Heathcote Valley and is visible from central and eastern Christchurch. It is an area of high quality landscape and vertical cliffs uncluttered by buildings. Ecologically it has very high natural values. From a recreation perspective its rock faces provide an important area for rock climbing.

LOCATION AND ACCESS

The property encompasses virtually the entire remaining rural area in the upper Heathcote Valley between Heathcote Quarry Reserve to the north east and Bridle Path and Castle Rock Reserve to the north west. The top of the property connects with Britten Reserve, Mt Cavendish Reserve and the Summit Road.

Access to the property would be from Heathcote Quarry Reserve, Birdsey Reserve on Bridle path Road, Britten Reserve, Bridle Path and the Summit Road.

SCENIC AND LANDSCAPE VALUE

The rock faces and cliff lines (old lava flows) are an outstanding feature of the eastern Port Hills when viewed from the city and the Summit Road.

Acquisition of this property will protect a virtually unencumbered open space panorama stretching from Mt Pleasant to Castle Rock Reserve.

The open spur which divides the property midway and descends down to residential Heathcote Valley is a prominent landscape feature of this area.

NATURAL HERITAGE VALUE

All the land above 200m altitude included in sites 27.04 and 27.06 (the majority of the property) is "A" graded and regarded as among the best of the city's natural heritage sites. The flora of the rocky cliffs is particularly outstanding.

RECREATION

The north facing cliffs at the top of the property are popular with rock climbers due to their warm climbing faces in winter.

Walking groups also occasionally use the property.

The main recreation opportunity presented by this purchase will be the ability to link up Heathcote Quarry Reserve with the top of Mt Pleasant and Britten Reserve.

A walkway sited on the property's prominent, middle ridge will allow access from the valley floor to the Summit Road thus providing an alternative link to the Bridle Path.

OPEN SPACE PLANNING CONTEXT

The proposed purchase will be a key part of the grasslands part of the Port Hills Regional Park concept adopted by the Council in April 1999. It has local visual and recreation importance to the residents of Heathcote Valley as well as metropolitan importance. This purchase will link five Council Reserves together and provide visual ecological and recreation continuity between Britten Reserve in the east with Castle Rock in the west.

The lower portion of the property was subject to a City Plan decision restricting residential development to a relatively small portion of the applicant's property off Bridle Path Road which is not included within the area to be purchased. The proposal was opposed by other submitters to the city plan process. Mr Scott has lodged an appeal against the decision which seeks to enlarge the residential area around the base of the property's central spur and further up the valley.

The proposed purchase offers a 'final solution' to the issue of residential development in the more prominent part of the Heathcote Valley hill backdrops. Mr Scott is however retaining a buffer strip of several hectares around his home section as a buffer between his house and any reserve.

LEASING/MAINTENANCE/DEVELOPMENT

Maintenance of the property would continue to be by grazing which would provide a modest return. This income would offset some of the development costs, which would mostly consist of track provision.

The sale is subject to Mr Scott retaining the grazing rights to the area in the same fashion as his licence over Castle Rock Reserve.

SOURCE OF FUNDS

The purchase will be funded from the strategic reserve purchase fund in the 1999/2000 corporate plan. When the Living Hills zoned area is subdivided on Mr Scott's property, or a subsequent owner, this cash will bolster the reserve fund in this area. Thus this purchase can be seen as taking the cash in lieu contribution in advance for the benefit of the local community.

NAMING RIGHTS

As the property has been in the Scott family for approximately 90 years the family has asked for naming rights. This is supported by the Parks Unit and the Community Board which recommends that the proposed reserve be known as the Scotts Valley Scenic Reserve.

CONCLUSION

Mr Scott's offer presents the Council with a unique opportunity to protect the Heathcote Valley part of the city backdrop for all time at a reasonable price.

It will prevent further urban encroachment onto the Port Hills over the majority of the mid to upper levels and especially on the prominent central spur. The potential and existing recreation and scenic values of the valley are high, as are its natural heritage values.

This potential purchase fits all reserve criteria, and is an essential part of the Council's overall Port Hills Reserve strategy.

- Recommendation:**
1. That the property be purchased for a reserve on the terms contained in the public excluded section of this report.
 2. That the reserve be known as Scotts Valley Scenic Reserve.