

4. CANTERBURY PARK: PROPOSAL FOR AN INDOOR MULTI-USE EQUESTRIAN FACILITY

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The purpose of this report is to seek Council approval for Christchurch Riding for the Disabled (RDA) to lease a site on the recently acquired A&P show grounds, to erect a indoor arena adjacent to the A&P stables.

INTRODUCTION

It will be recalled that the Council purchased 89ha of Canterbury Agricultural Park from the A&P Association in March this year. This purchase has increased the total Council reserve size to 126ha. The planning process for the site is under way, with many ideas and applications being received from the public. The Parks and Waterways Unit is preparing a display in a tent at this year's show to present the various applications and design options for this important new park. Workshops will also be held with key partners such as the A&P Association and exhibitors.

While other applications are being held over until this year's show and planning workshops, RDA's lease application is being promoted as an exception. RDA proposes to erect a large, clear-span building suitable for a range of displays and exhibits within the leased area. Two commercial bloodstock companies are interested in utilising the building for their sales. In addition, the association of horse riding with the new park is considered to be a sound objective, complementing the existing outdoor arena, stables and cross-country course.

RDA is an association of volunteers who fund, provide facilities and organise therapeutic riding programmes for people of all ages with a wide range of physical, intellectual and mental disabilities.

In 1997 the Christchurch Group of RDA identified a need to expand its facilities, which could not be done at its present site. A Lotto-funded feasibility study quantified the demand for therapeutic riding in Christchurch and identified the criteria for relocation and expansion of its facilities. Since 1997 the committee has looked at several relocation options, but the option that best satisfies the criteria is at Canterbury Park.

CRITERIA IDENTIFIED FOR RELOCATION

- The facility must be easily accessible for riders and helpers.
- There must be a minimum of 10ha of grazing land for up to 14 horses.
- Secure tenure, either a long-term lease of 20 years or ownership.
- Covered arena for all-weather activity.
- The facilities, especially the indoor area, need to be available for income generation by hiring out.
- The facilities need to be visible to the public and to sponsors.
- There must be a reasonable rural outlook and area for riding-out.
- Security of the horses and the facility is an important consideration.

DEMAND

On average, Christchurch RDA receives three calls per week from individuals or groups wanting to enrol riders in their programmes. The waiting list has been closed at 40 individuals and five groups listed. For people with disabilities, having a stimulating, animal-oriented, rural-type activity within the city is a huge attraction. Many of the rider families have time and financial constraints to consider, so for them location is an important consideration. Volunteer helpers are also attracted to riding for disabled groups, as they not only assist but gain the benefits of keeping fit and learning new skills. A survey of the volunteer helpers shows a wide range of people, from those on a benefit, people new to the city, students, semi-retired and retired, to school students doing projects, etc. An indoor area to be able to operate in all weathers and a safe ride-out area would greatly enhance the group's activities.

MULTI-USE

At present Christchurch RDA operates during school time (four blocks of ten weeks) five days a week, with 72 regular riders per week plus short-term extra groups. The committee of 12 co-ordinates fundraising, training, medical consents, horses and the six instructors. To help with the therapeutic riding sessions, feed and care for the horses, 80 extra volunteers a week come to RDA. Although RDA expects to increase its operating hours with expansion, the arenas will often be available for other groups during weekends, school holidays, after school and evenings. A large indoor arena (size yet to be finalised, but could be up to 40m x 80m) plus a 40m x 20m outdoor arena would mean that several groups or individuals could use the space concurrently. RDA sessions are generally run in a small area to provide security and safety for the riders.

WHY CANTERBURY PARK?

A survey of main equestrian groups (dressage, show-jumping, pony clubs, riding groups, polo) by the Christchurch RDA committee showed that siting the facilities and proposed indoor arena at Canterbury Park would be of enormous benefit to these equestrian groups as well as Christchurch RDA. Canterbury A&P Association would use it for the November show, and two commercial horse racing groups have also indicated they would use the facility for yearling sales. The profile of RDA would be raised for fundraising and sponsorship plus volunteer helpers. More people would see the benefits of a therapeutic riding programme, attracting equestrian and therapy expertise to the organisation.

Eighty volunteers a week would walk the RDA riders and horses through the park. A much-needed indoor riding facility and associated Canterbury A&P stables, plus good parking, would be readily accessible to many different equestrian groups in the Canterbury area.

PROPOSED LEASE AREA

The proposed location of the new indoor arena is beside the Isaac Arena and existing stables (still owned by the A&P Association). While a range of site options has been considered, they are all in this general area, as all the facilities need to be linked operationally (see tabled plan).

It is likely that a notified resource consent will be required and this will provide an opportunity for public comment on the proposed building. This is likely to overlap the show and consultation planned for the remaining park area. Council approval, in principle, is sought to enable RDA to proceed with its detailed planning.

CONCLUSION

While planning for the whole 126ha site needs careful consideration, the RDA lease application is considered to be complementary to existing facilities.

Developing the A&P area for multi-use equestrian activities would give the sports of dressage, show jumping and pony clubs, etc a home in the city similar to other sports such as soccer and rugby.

Last but not least, people with disabilities would not only be able participate in an excellent therapy programme, but would also be able to share an outdoor park by being taken through the park on horse-back.

Approval in principle is being sought at this stage. Other applications are being held over until a more comprehensive development plan is prepared for the whole reserve and a display tent will be set up at this year's A&P show, in which workshops will be held and proposals displayed. RDA's application is so complementary to existing facilities and activities, eg the show and horse sales, etc, that their application is considered worthy of progressing to detailed planning and resource consent work now. RDA have also been waiting for some two years to secure a new site and have obtained significant funding and investigated secondary users of their proposed building. If the Council agrees, detailed designs and lease arrangements for the facility will be brought back to the new Council in December.

The above proposal was supported in principle by the Riccarton/Wigram Community Board at its meeting on 5 September 2001.

Recommendation: That the Christchurch Riding for the Disabled application to lease approximately 4,000m² adjacent to the Isaac Arena in Canterbury Park be approved in principle.