

11. PURCHASE OF DRAINAGE AND RECREATIONAL RESERVE ON HEATHCOTE VALLEY FLOODPLAIN (TRUSCOTTS ROAD)

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Corporate Plan Output: Reserve Purchases	

The purpose of this report is to consider the purchase of a Drainage and Recreation Reserve on the Heathcote Valley Floodplain adjacent to Truscotts Road.

LOCATION

The proposed reserve (refer attached plan) is located on the low-lying paddocks within the Heathcote Valley adjacent to, and south of Ferrymead Park Drive and east of Truscotts Road (across the road from Ferrymead Historic Park). The 16.9140 ha area sought is currently in pasture with remnant salt meadow plants still evident. The pasture is generally poor and supports only a few horses under its present management regime.

The area sought for drainage purposes has been identified for protection and future enhancement work in the current Waterways and Wetlands Asset Management Plan (Project Area 1a: Port Hills). The balance of the area would be suitable for a sports ground.

BACKGROUND

The Heathcote Valley is located within the Christchurch City Urban Area, southeast of the central city at the base of the Port Hills. It is the last contributing stormwater catchment to the Heathcote River, prior to its confluence with the Avon-Heathcote Estuary.

Most of the catchment is rural, and large tracts of open low-lying pasture are largely undeveloped over the lower floodplain.

Like the Avoca Valley floodplain this area is considered by some to have potential for future development and pressure to rezone areas within the floodplain was evident in the City Plan hearings and recently in the Council's Variation to the City Plan, Variation 37.

Considerable time over the last few years has been put into investigation of this area along with the Avoca Valley Catchment, which lies immediately adjacent to the Heathcote Valley. This investigation work has carefully considered the areas' constraints and opportunities, and is ongoing as new interests and opportunities arise. Examples of recent interest include a golf driving range, and a pre-European Heritage Area.

Over the next few months a concept development plan will be developed for the area. Whilst Council staff will facilitate this process, it is hoped the plan can be developed in partnership with the community and special interest groups, through public workshops and consultation. This process will of course have regard to the physical constraints of the area.

The issue of a critical shortage of sports grounds in the Sumner and Ferrymead areas was raised mid-1997 by representatives of sports clubs in these areas. Following a series of meetings held later that year between the clubs, their sports associations and the Council, it was concluded that land for additional sports grounds in the Ferrymead area should be acquired when it became available.

The purchase of the Ferrymead land for the development of a new sports ground will help to address the following issues and needs for provision of sports facilities in the Sumner and Ferrymead areas:

1. Lessen identified deficiencies in sports grounds in these areas.
2. Help to meet future needs for sports grounds in these areas, where there has been, and is expected to be, a significant population growth.
3. The land in question is the nearest suitably flat land for new sports grounds in the Sumner and Ferrymead areas.
4. A significant number of representatives of Sumner/Ferrymead sports clubs, and of the respective sports associations, have expressed concern at the shortage of sports grounds in their areas.

SPECIAL PURPOSE ZONE (FERRYMEAD/VARIATION 37)

The land is currently zoned SP (Ferrymead) with an underlying Rural Zoning. A Council initiated Zone Change, Variation 37, sought an Ru2 zone over this block. This zoning, combined with riverside/estuary conservation and open space zonings is part of a strategy to provide a long-term buffer/green edge/wildlife refuge/stormwater drainage and flood detention area alongside the lower Heathcote River, which will limit significant development and consequent filling over existing low-lying land.

The owner of the subject land was supportive of the Variation 37 intent to maintain a Rural Zoning over his land at that time, but understood that this zoning did allow subdivision to 4 ha blocks with dwelling rights. He was also aware of the potential for increased flooding over his land from new urban zoning elsewhere in the catchment, proposed in the City Plan, and the Council's intention to establish a stormwater drainage cost share scheme to mitigate that increase in urban stormwater runoff.

The proposed drainage scheme will enhance waterway capacity and stormwater detention over much of his land. This would, however, conflict with any efficient farming activity and dwellings allowed under City Plan Rules.

The purchase of this land is consistent with the zoning strategy and meets the current owner's expectations for the land, albeit that he would have liked the future opportunity to construct dwellings for his children on at least one of the blocks. His family have lived in the valley for a number of years and they wish to remain and, if possible, help preserve the rural character. Quitting the land completely and buying larger, buildable sections overlooking the valley has proved to be the best option for the owner, given his support of the Council's intentions for the land.

DRAINAGE AND SEA LEVEL RISE CONSIDERATIONS

The land sought is low-lying and would be subject to regular tidal inundation from the Heathcote River without the existing stopbanking and tidal controls in place.

The area is also prone to flooding from the greater valley catchment during severe storm events coincident with high tides. Being low-lying, however, provides a very large area for floodwater storage, which protects other low-lying areas upstream during such events.

Filling of this land which will be required with any urban development, would see this storage and tidal buffer area lost, and will compound drainage problems upstream, particularly west of the railway line along Port Hills Road.

Further, with sea level rise predicted over the next century, riverside/estuary areas like this will be invaluable in that they will offer the City floodable areas (notwithstanding the ecological benefits) to assist any future drainage system to hold back, or at least delay, the full impact of sea-level rise.

CURRENT WILDLIFE VALUES

The current vegetation is predominantly grazed pasture, with salt pans found in low-lying areas, or waste areas. Although considered less species-rich than some other parts of the estuary, if any stormwater detention system was designed and managed as a wetland, it could still make an important contribution to the overall ecological richness of the Avon-Heathcote system.

PLAYING FIELDS

For many years, the Parks Unit has recognised that there is a lack of full size playing fields in the Sumner-Ferrymead area. Construction of playing fields over the subject land will meet this shortfall, providing a benefit to greater the Hagley/Ferrymead ward.

The existing fill over the area considered for the actual playing fields will assist in their establishment, requiring only relatively minor restorative earthworks. The siting of the playing fields adjacent to a flood detention area will provide for a greater 'floodable' area during the more infrequent, but severe, storm events. The combination of the two green areas also provides for a larger permanent green footprint in this area and achieves a more efficient multi-purpose land use.

PROPERTY DETAILS AND SETTLEMENT

To assess the land's value the Council engaged the services of Ford Baker Ltd. The details of the property settlement are contained in the public excluded section of this report.

SOURCE OF FUNDS

The purchase will be funded by the Parks Reserves Fund and the Waterways and Wetlands Fund. As the purchase has been negotiated over four financial years, sufficient funds have already been set aside.

A percentage, yet to be determined but likely to be up to 50% of the drainage share of the purchase, will be retrieved under the drainage cost share scheme to be established for the valley.

The above report was before the Hagley/Ferrymead Community Board at its meeting on 31 January 2001. The Board supported the proposal.

Recommendation: That the property be acquired on the terms and conditions contained within the Public Excluded section of this report.