

3. RICHMOND HILL PURCHASE OF LAND FOR PARK

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The purpose of this report is to seek the support of the Council for a park purchase of some 284 ha of Port Hills rural land on Richmond Hill.

INTRODUCTION

The Richmond Hill property, covers an area of approximately 331 ha on the hills above Moncks Bay, Clifton and Sumner. The land is extensively farmed, with part of the lower property formerly managed as a private golf course. A reference to rezone a further 27 ha of land Living Hills on the old golf course area is currently before the Environment Court.



View from Richmond Hill Farm across Pegasus bay

CITY PLAN

In 1995 the proposed plan was publicly notified and provided for an additional 10 ha of Living Hills zoning adjoining the existing residential area on Richmond Hill. The Council Decision No. 136 rezoned a further six hectares from Rural Hills to Living HA (deferred). The deferment over the additional six hectares would be lifted once the Council had acquired the remainder of the property, an area of approximately 300 ha.

The Council's decision was appealed by the Greenwood Estate, who sought relief that the Living Hills Zone be extended over a further 27 ha or, alternatively, that all of its land currently shown on the planning map as LHA and LHA (deferred) be zoned LHA with no deferment.

The Canterbury Regional Council, Sumner Residents' Association, Clifton Neighbourhood Committee and several others gave notice under section 271A of the Resource Management Act that they wished to appear as parties to these proceedings.

The parties, including the Council, have entered into negotiations regarding this reference. A draft sale and purchase agreement has been negotiated which will result in some 284 ha of land being acquired by the Council. A further 25 ha adjoining the LHA Zone will be retained by the owners and Zoned Rural H, with the proviso that should the owners decide to sell the land the Council has reserved the first right of refusal to acquire the area.

OPEN SPACE CONTEXT

Richmond Hill is the last major area of rural land left outside the parks network in the Sumner area. The proposed purchase will link Scarborough Hill Park with Barnett Park and Sumner, Clifton and Richmond Hills with the Summit Road and Conservation Estate above the harbour basin.

NATURAL VALUES

Richmond Hill Farm has a plant cover of silver tussock, native herbs and exotic pasture plants, a legacy of at least 600 years of human modification of the natural environment. Two small clusters of the natural forest cover of the area are still found within the proposed park purchase area. Trees such as kowhai, narrow leaved lacebark and ngaio can be found in these natural fragments, which are now rare on the outer rim of the Lyttelton Volcano above the City.

The property contains at least five natural sites of ecological importance to the City. Included within the purchase are the majority of the areas of two top level "A" sites. "A" sites are the top rated natural areas in the City. Natural sites are ranked on an A (top) to E (lowest) rating system based on factors such as percentage cover of native plants, naturalness, rarity, area and biodiversity. One "A" site is situated around Windsor Castle, a prominent midslope rock outcrop, and the other encompasses a large gully to the western side of the proposed subdivision. The gully "A" site contains at least 22 native plant species, whereas the Windsor Castle site is notable for its native herb and rock flora on the rocky escarpment on its northeast and east sides.

RECREATION OPPORTUNITY

Richmond Hill Farm has traditionally been used by local and city users for public recreation activities such as walking at the discretion of the owners. This privilege has been dependent on the goodwill of the owners and cannot necessarily be expected to continue with new owners should the property be retained in private ownership.

The higher reaches of the farm above Windsor Castle offer opportunities for relatively easy graded walkways and mountain bike routes through good quality tussock grassland with excellent views over Sumner, Moncks Bay, the Estuary and Pegasus Bay to the Kaikoura Mountains.

The Council is securing an access licence over the existing track which runs from the end of Richmond Hill Road through the retained land to the area being acquired by the Council. In terms of the licence the public will have the right on foot, horseback and by bicycle to use the track while the Council will have the right to access it by vehicle for the purposes of maintenance and conducting its farming operations.

PORT HILLS ACQUISITIONS STRATEGY

In April 1999 the Council approved the Port Hills Regional Park Acquisitions Strategy. This policy document proposed that the Council acquire land on the Port Hills to provide multiple environmental, landscape and recreation values for the growing City and visitors. Key concepts included in the strategy include City skyline protection, landscape integration, ecological sustainability, conservation, water quality and catchment enhancement, recreation opportunity and historical and cultural values.

The proposed land purchase falls within the proposed Regional Park area and fulfils the majority of the above criteria.

Also the Council is reserving the right to acquire from the estate the additional rural land that it is retaining should it decide to sell the area in the future. In the meantime the Council will have the use of the land for grazing purposes.

THE PURCHASE AREA

The 284 ha acquisition will provide long term protection for the majority of the remaining upper Port Hills in the Sumner area, and the lower gullies on both sides of Richmond Hill. The further 25 ha adjoining the LHA Zone to be retained by the owners and Zoned Rural H includes a portion of the Windsor Castle ecological site. However the agreement provides the Council with the first right of purchase should the owners choose to sell, as well as giving it the use of the land up until that time.

HAGLEY/FERRYMEAD COMMUNITY BOARD

The Hagley/Ferrymead Community Board has considered this purchase and recommends that it proceed.

- Recommendation:**
1. That the property be acquired subject to the terms and conditions contained in the public excluded section of this report.
 2. That the Council resolve:
 - (a) To acquire the areas contained in the schedule below as a scenic reserve pursuant to Section 19(1)(a) of the Reserves Act 1977.
 - (b) Pursuant to Section 16(2)A to classify the land contained within the schedule as scenic reserve pursuant to Section 19(1)(a) of the Reserves Act 1977.

Schedule

All that parcel of land containing 10.9209 hectares being part Rural Section 15420 and being all of the land in identifier CB20B/833 Canterbury Registry

All that parcel of land containing approximately 80 hectares being part Lot 1 DP4018 and being part of the land in identifier CB6B/860 Canterbury Registry.

All that parcel of land containing 8.0937 hectares approximately, being Rural Section 745 and being all of the land contained in identifier CB554/39 Canterbury Registry.

3. That the Council resolve to hold the balance of the land for recreation purposes under Section 601 of the Local Government Act 1974.
4. That, at an appropriate time, the Council promote a variation or change to the City Plan altering the zoning of the land to be acquired from Rural H to Conservation 1.