

4. PROPOSED SHARED CHRISTCHURCH CITY COUNCIL/NORTH CANTERBURY FISH AND GAME COUNCIL FACILITY AT THE GROYNES

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The purpose of this report is to present the concept for a shared Christchurch City Council Park Rangers/North Canterbury Fish and Game Council administration building at the Groynes and the development of a joint public environmental education facility in the park.

CONTEXT

The North Canterbury Fish and Game Council (henceforth referred to as “Fish and Game”) previously approached the Christchurch City Council with a request to co-locate its Christchurch office, presently sited on its own property at 3 Horatio Street, with the Christchurch City Council Park Rangers (henceforth referred to as “Park Rangers”) office in a shared building at the Groynes which covers land leased from the Canterbury Regional Canterbury (Environment Canterbury).

Discussions between staff of the Christchurch City Council and Fish and Game regarding the request commenced in 2001 and culminated in a concept being included in the draft the Groynes Concept Plan for the existing Park Rangers office/visitors centre to be replaced with a new, shared Park Rangers/Fish and Game building as a public facility with an emphasis on environmental education and interpretation. This building was to be located near the existing entrance of the Groynes and situated beside a branch of the Otukaikino Creek along with pedestrian bridges, a pier, a landscaped frontage and car parking.

There was little comment by submitters to the draft plan on the shared building concept although the majority of the submitters who responded on the concept tick box response form for the concept ticked the support box for this concept.

Support for the concept in principle is now being sought so that work can then proceed with the development of a full project plan for the proposed development, including siting, design/landscape plans, detailed costings, identification of potential funding sources and addressing of legal and lease considerations.

Figure 1: The Groynes context



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following an application from the North Canterbury Fish and Game Council to relocate from its existing inner-city offices to a shared facility with the Christchurch City Council's Park Rangers at the Groynes was included in the draft the Groynes Concept Plan, which was advertised for public comment at the end of 2001.

Little, although supporting, public response was received on the concept. Subsequently, two alternatives to the original concept have been considered. One is for, initially, a Stage 1 redevelopment of the existing Park Ranger's house to serve as a shared administration office facility for the Park Rangers and Fish and Game, as well as the sharing of an existing nearby storage facility. A second stage of development is for a new, jointly run public environmental education facility on the bank of Otukaikino Creek by the Park Ranger's house site, along with the provision of a public car parking area.

Funding and management of the proposed project will be a partnership between the City Council and Fish and Game. The costs to achieve Stage 1 will be shared by the partners with contributions from other sources, such as from sponsorship and grants, offsetting this. Fish and Game suggests that the Stage 2 costs could possibly be wholly met from other sources.

Further investigation of project options is required to provide detail of siting, design, cost, funding sources, time frames and legal/licensing requirements. Once these investigations are completed and the project proposal adjusted, further public comment will be sought followed by a new project proposal report to the Council by way of the Shirley/Papanui Community Board and the Parks, Gardens and Waterways Committee.

RELEVANT CURRENT POLICY

The vision for an enhanced park is embodied in the proposed concepts promoted in the draft The Groynes Concept Plan. One of the concepts in the plan refers to the replacement of the Park Rangers office facility with one shared with Fish and Game.

The Groynes is seen to be part of a network of parks making up a proposed Waimakariri Corridor Regional Park, conceptual planning for which is ongoing.

Co-occupation of leasehold land at The Groynes by both Fish and Game and the City Council, and erection of a building on this land, will require an adjustment to the lease by which the City Council holds the land, with the lessor's (Canterbury Regional Council) approval. Any change in the use of the park will be subject to the City Council's Park's Code of Practice, including its leasing and licensing policy.

THE PROPOSAL

Benefits

Although the proposal has arisen from an application by Fish and Game and will, if it goes ahead, be a significant benefit to that organisation, there is also an opportunity for the City Council to benefit, depending upon the nature of the development that would take place. Benefits to the City Council could include:

- Acquisition of new and enhanced facilities that otherwise would likely not be realised.
- An opportunity to raise the public profile of The Groynes with a new partnership and facility.
- Able to enhance environmental education and add to recreational opportunities, such as recreational fishing, through working co-operatively with a partner.
- Economy of scale savings with shared costs and better use of existing infrastructure.

Implications

- Initial unfamiliarity between new partners and with each other's roles.
- Perceived loss of identity for the Park Rangers.
- Who gives the main public face at The Groynes?
- Large increase in staff on site (seven Fish and Game staff and four Park Rangers) and possibly more in the future.
- Emphasis of proposal on an education facility whereas current Park Ranger education programme is based more on using the environment as the classroom.

Options

There are many potential options for a shared development, with three considered in this report. Other potential options may arise following further investigations and considerations. What is required is for political approval of the concept of a shared facility at The Groynes before a final preferred option or options can be proposed in detail.

Some of the points made in this report are derived from a letter of application from Fish and Game to the Shirley/Papanui Community Board (see Appendix A attached). Fish and Game's submission to the draft The Groynes Concept Plan is attached as Appendix B.

Option 1: Park Ranger's house

This option involves a staged development, comprising (1) an initial Stage I redevelopment of the Park Ranger's house, located near the north-western boundary of the park and alongside the northern branch of Otukaikino Creek, as a shared Park Rangers/Fish and Game administration office, along with the sharing of nearby existing storage facilities and (2) a possibly later Stage II development of a jointly run public environmental education facility, sited nearby on the banks of the creek, plus the provision of a public car parking area.

Details of the possible staged development are:

Stage I:

Redevelopment of the Park Ranger's house as a shared administration facility with separate office areas for each organisation and common shared central areas, such as toilet/restroom facilities, tearoom, entrance foyer and reception area, making up the balance. This will require renovation of the interior. One possible development concept is the one prepared by an architect for Fish and Game and this is shown in Figure 2 (see Appendix C (attached) for a clearer copy of the original prepared by an architect for Fish and Game).

Appropriate landscaping and access ways around the building would need to be implemented. Other than for specific enquiries and business, such as the issue of fishing and hunting licences by Fish and Game, it is expected that the building and its immediate surroundings will primarily be used as a staff facility for the two organisations.

To maintain an attractive frontage to the building, staff work and private vehicle parking would be kept separate to the public car parking area, preferably out of sight and screened with landscaping and plantings.

Stage 2:

Construction of a new purpose-built building alongside, and possibly even over-reaching, the Otukaikino Creek close to the proposed shared office building (see Figure 2 for a possible siting). This is anticipated to be a full public access facility that provides joint Park Rangers / Fish and Game-run environmental education services. When not in use as an education facility, the building could be used for meetings for a range of groups, including the Fish and Game Council, fishing club and the community board. In addition a well-landscaped public car parking area under or amongst existing shrubs and trees would be developed in close proximity to the facility.

Advantages

- Existing infrastructure is used.
- The building is of a good size with the potential to enhance and enlarge.
- This option is a relatively low cost one.
- Fish and Game consider this to be a stunning position for environmental education, with it being adjacent to one of the more natural stretches of waterway in the Christchurch area.
- In the future more traffic may be directed to this part of the park.
- The building is not being used, nor needed, for Park Ranger or other Council staff private accommodation purposes.

Disadvantages

- Could initially be difficult for the public, including Fish and Game's clients, to find although this can be addressed with signage and small roading changes.
- The development would be sited on Canterbury Regional Council (CRC) administered reserve land, comprising endowment and river conservation titles, and leased by the Christchurch City Council – consequently, written consent from the CRC would be required for the development and adjustment to the lease.

Option 2: House No. 2 (by John's Road)

This is an existing building on the park currently occupied by one of the park rangers (see Figure 1 for its location).

Advantages

- Redevelopment will be at a relatively low cost;
- Will involve a use of existing infrastructure;
- Close to the road, a main visitor gathering area and a main waterway at The Groynes.

Disadvantages

- The building may not be large enough to provide space for both Fish and Game and the Park Rangers;
- There is a large amount of road noise from Johns Road;
- Regular public access off the busy Johns Road has safety implications and is likely to not be approved by Transit;
- The nearby developed waterway is not considered by Fish and Game to be a good site for environmental education;
 - This may not be a part of the park where most of the traffic is directed in the future.
 - The site is on land leased from the Canterbury Regional Council and would require their written consent, along with an adjustment to the lease.

Option 3: A new purpose-built building at the park entrance

This is the concept proposed in the draft The Groynes Concept Plan. See Figures 3 and 4 for a concept drawing and plan.

Advantages

- The land on which the development would be sited is Christchurch City Council held (as Fee Simple for Recreation Reserve purposes) – therefore, Canterbury Regional Council consent would not be required;
- A new, quality, high profile, attractive building that can make a statement, is built for the purpose and can draw people in;
- At the entrance to the park;
- Easily accessed and easy to find;
- Adjacent to a waterway;
- Trees along the waterway will screen the building from nearby visitor gathering areas.

Disadvantages

- Concern over the potentially significant costs it could entail (the possible order of preliminary costs indicated in the draft plan was for \$500,000 to \$1,000,000) even though these would be shared by both the City Council and Fish and Game with possible contributions from other funding sources such as through sponsorship and grants;
- Concern over the loss of green open space that would result from the development of adjoining storage facility and car parking areas;
- The adjoining developed waterway is not considered by Fish and Game to be a good site for environmental education;
- Construction of a new facility is not a good use of existing infrastructure;
- It is not in keeping with the Park Ranger's vision for The Groynes.

The Christchurch City Council's role

As the existing occupant and manager, the City Council has already established facilities and operational and educational programmes at The Groynes and these will be maintained in the event Fish and Game become resident in the park. The educational aspect is Park Ranger-run with assistance from City Council environmental educators employed under Learning Experiences Outside The Classroom (LEOTC), a Ministry of Education funded programme.

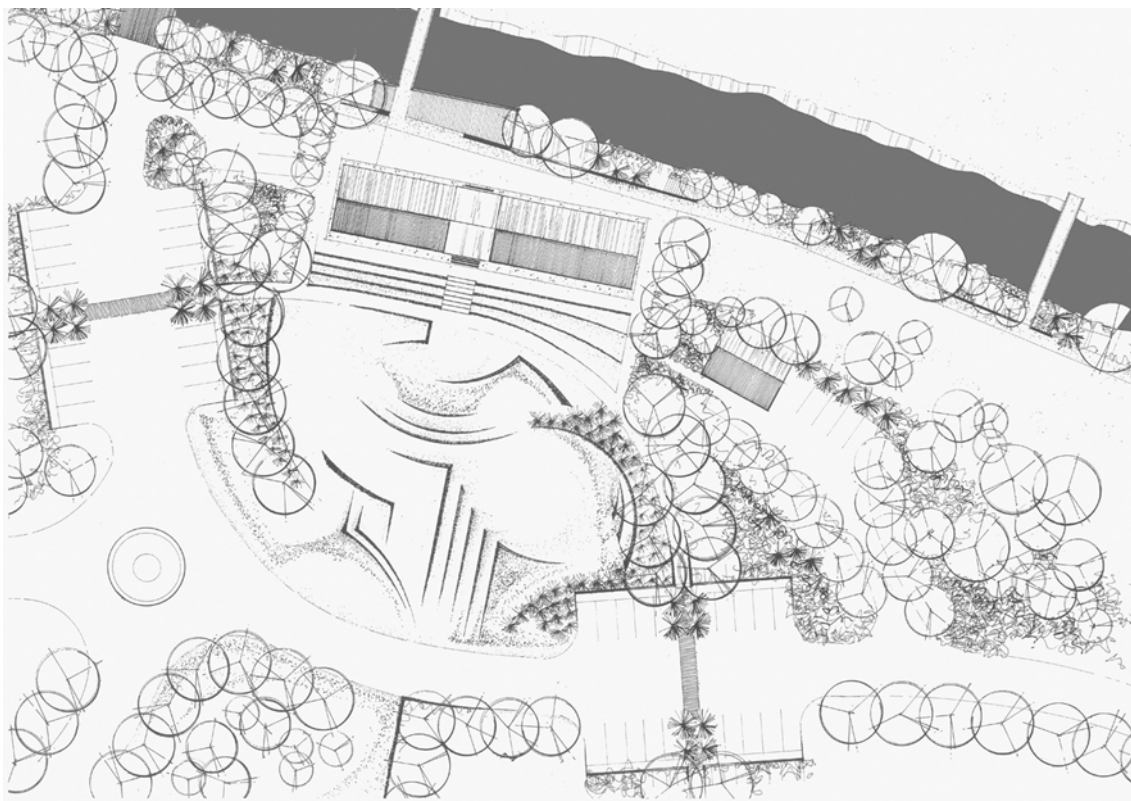
Fish and Game's presence could serve to enhance the provision of services to the public in the park, including environmental education. It may also allow the City Council to improve its office and information/education facilities to a level that possibly would not be achieved outside a cost-sharing arrangement.

The City Council's role in this situation would be to share in partnership with Fish and Game the cost of development, and operation, of the proposed new facilities and enhanced education programmes. A formal contract would be required to formalise the mutual obligations, roles and responsibilities of the two organisations to ensure a successful cohabitation on the site. Management of, and planning for, the park would remain the sole role of the City Council although Fish and Game could be invited to assist in some areas such as waterway monitoring and enhancement.

Figure 3: Option 3



Figure 4: Option 3



ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Fish and Game requires new office and storage facilities due to their existing accommodation in an inner city industrial building not being the most appropriate setting for the nature of their business. They wish to relocate to a site that is in a relatively natural waterway setting close to the city, one that provides better access for the visiting public and gives them (Fish and Game) the opportunity to better interact with the wider community through the provision of an environmental education. In their view, The Groynes is an ideal location.

The benefit for Fish and Game to relocate their operation to The Groynes is the opportunity for them to share facilities with the Park Rangers already located there. Consequences of this should be better overall outcomes for both organisations through cost sharing, economy of scale, more efficient multi-use and optimisation of use of facilities and being able to work cooperatively in the area of environmental education.

The Park Ranger's existing Park Ranger's office/visitor centre facility at the entrance to The Groynes is relatively dated and uninspiring, although in sound structural condition (see Figure 5). The option to relocate with Fish and Game could be seen to be a constructive step with a benefit for the City Council being, in addition to those mentioned above, the opportunity to develop much improved office and public information/education facilities that might not otherwise be realised.

The proposal is expected to result in the achievement of a more appropriate facility at a lower cost to both organisations.

Any concerns about potential loss of identity for either the Park Rangers or Fish and Game should be negated with a clear written agreement as to the respective roles and responsibilities.

Developments on land at The Groynes leased by the City Council from the Canterbury Regional Council (CRC) will require the latter's written consent, being the lessor of the land. A sub-lease, also with CRC consent in writing, may be required. Any improvement on the lease land, including buildings, consented to by the lessor will be the property of the lessee and/or sub-lessee.

Other issues that would need to be considered include:

- Formal agreement on the sharing of facility operating costs.
- The matter of the currently unregistered status of the City Council's lease with the Canterbury Regional Council (which means the lease, and any sub-lease, cannot be for longer than 20 years).
- What to do with the existing Park Ranger's office / visitors centre building if vacated.
- The implications of further Park Ranger and Fish and Game staff relocating to The Groynes in the future.

Figure 5 Existing Park Ranger's office / visitors centre at The Groynes entrance



Funding

Any shared development project option at The Groynes would be funded and managed by both the City Council and Fish and Game in partnership.

Development of a shared administration office would be achieved through a sharing of costs by the two organisations, each wholly or partly assisted with the release of funds following the closure of their current respective offices. There may also be the possibility for some of the costs to be met through receipt of contributions from other funding sources, such as from sponsorship or grants.

The cost of a separate environmental education facility could be met through other funding sources.

At this stage, the likely costs of the project cannot be estimated. Further investigation will be required before realistic costings can be established. In the case of development of an existing City Council owned building, a registered valuer would be needed to value the building (discounted if dismantled back to a shell from which redevelopment commences) as a contribution to the City Council's share of the cost of the development.

Ongoing operational costs for the proposed facilities would need to be shared by both the City Council and Fish and Game, from their respective operational budgets and subject to written agreement.

RESULTS OF CONSULTATION

To date, discussions have taken place between staff of the City Council and Fish and Game over the proposal. It has also been promoted as a concept in the draft The Groynes Concept Plan, which was advertised for public comment at the end of 2001. The analysis of submissions received on this is being presented in a separate report (see next clause). There was little public feedback on the shared building concept and most of this was in support.

The intention now is to obtain approval for the concept in principle and for further investigations to be carried out on possible development options, siting, design, cost, revenue sources, lease and legal matters and any other relevant requirements before seeking further public comment and reporting once again to the Council for final approval.

CONCLUSIONS

The concept for Fish and Game to relocate to shared office and public environmental education facilities with the Park Rangers at The Groynes has been discussed extensively between staff of the respective organisations. Although the original design concept for a new purpose-built facility put forward in the draft The Groynes Concept Plan for public consultation received no opposition, it was decided to reconsider its merits in comparison with other options. Following this, redevelopment of the house sites near (1) the northwestern boundary of the park and (2) John's Road have been put forward as alternative possible options. There may, of course, be other possible options not yet considered.

The above proposal was considered by the Shirley/Papanui Community Board at its meeting on 5 March 2003. The Board unanimously endorsed the proposal and the following recommendations.

- Recommendation:**
1. That staff continue discussions with North Canterbury Fish and Game on a shared facility at another location, the Groynes being considered not suitable for the proposed facility.
 2. That the Parks, and Waterways Manager report to the Parks, Gardens and Waterways Committee with a schedule of existing environmental education centres within the city.