

5. SPRINGLANDS NATURAL HERITAGE PARK - PROPERTY PURCHASE – QUAIFES ROAD

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The purpose of this report is to consider the purchase of a portion of the property at 165 Quaifes Road, for the purpose of establishing a “Core habitat” wetland area within the Springlands concept identified in the Waterways and Wetlands Natural Asset Management Strategy 1999.

CONTEXT OF THE REPORT

The adopted Waterways and Wetlands Natural Asset Management Strategy of 1999 (WWNAMS), Project Area 9, Halswell/Wigram Growth Area – Springlands Natural Heritage Park, identified a large area of land south of Halswell, off Quaifes Road, worthy of protection because of the existence of significant springs. The Vision developed for this Quaifes Road Springlands area was to “protect and make a feature of springs by increasing ponding in the area.”

“Springlands” (as depicted on the attached plan) lies within an area which is low lying, near the base of the Port Hills, where ground water emerges as springs. The springs provide the base flows within Knights Stream and the upper reaches of the Halswell River. The springs in turn are sustained by rainfall and lateral seepage from the Waimakariri River entering the permeable gravels of the Plains.

This area was identified in the City Plan as the most suitable area for urban growth in the longer term, subject to transportation and water-related issues being resolved. The latter was concerned with ground water quality protection and the management of the natural floodplains and ponding areas within the catchments of both the Heathcote and the Halswell Rivers. A strategy for addressing the water-related issues within the Quaifes Road area is to provide a network of green space which will give long term protection to existing water features (including the ephemeral wetlands associated with springs currently threatened by farming and lifestyle blocks), and provide space for water quantity/quality mitigation measures which would be necessary with any future urban growth in the area.

As part of its strategy the Council in 2001 approved the purchase of the property situated at 137 Quaifes Road comprising 7.9940ha which contained two significant springs at the headwaters of Creamery Stream.

An opportunity has now arisen to acquire part of the adjoining land to secure and protect additional springs which are effectively the source of Creamery Stream.

CURRENT PROPOSAL

In 2002, the owner of the neighbouring property situated at 165 Quaifes Road inquired whether the Council was interested in purchasing part of this property (as depicted on the attached aerial photograph and plan SM1243-01) containing the springs given that it was his intention to build a new house on the site in the relatively near future.

His proposal was to subdivide off the eastern half of his block where the springs exist and build a new dwelling for himself on the balance land. If the Council was not interested in the purchase, he would rebuild on the existing house site adjoining the springs. This would effectively further alienate the land from the future possibility of realising the Council’s vision. Subsequently, Council staff have been monitoring ground water levels within the property to determine whether or not a bid to purchase all of the land should be made, or whether to simply negotiate for the eastern half. Notwithstanding the favourable seasonal groundwater levels over the block, current priorities determined that only the eastern half of his land, that portion containing the springs should be sought.

WWNAMS - QUAIFES ROAD VISION & STRATEGY

The Vision developed for this Quaifes Road Springlands area was to “Protect and make a feature of springs by increasing ponding in the area.” To give effect to the Vision, a budget was proposed to acquire and develop 155 hectares of the ‘springs’ land and the land alongside existing drain/waterway corridors, between Halswell Junction Road and the Halswell River; from Whincops Road in the west to Halswell Road in the east.

Expenditure of \$800,000 per year over six years was proposed, beginning 2004/2005. "Opportunity" acquisitions to date have seen two significant parcels of land already acquired within the "Springlands" area centred around Quaifes Road; the Stoothoff Block off Sabys Road (Creamery Stream), and 137 Quaifes Road, which lies immediately to the east of 165 Quaifes Road.

Funds for the Halswell Southwest Christchurch area have been targeted to achieving good surface water management by acquiring a corridor from Aidanfield Subdivision to Hendersons Basin. Therefore this purchase is a priority 2 on the programme however at this stage because the planning is still in process no properties have been targeted for purchase to date.

DISCUSSION

Land purchase for "Springlands" is a long-term investment. It will add to the Council's current holding, 137 Quaifes Road, to provide a viable nucleus for the 'core habitat' wetland identified in the WWNAMS 1999. The "Springlands" concept is part of a well-founded vision and strategy that achieves the objectives and policies of the City Plan and Regional Policies. It has now been confirmed from the southwest area planning exercise that this site is high in environmental values and is earmarked as a prime site for protection. The spring-fed network supports good populations of freshwater crayfish no longer found in Christchurch waterways and it was surprising to find large numbers of this species at this location. The land can be added to as opportunities for purchase of surrounding rural land permit, or from future opportunities determined during any rezoning or subdivision process.

Given the long-term possibility of development in the area, it is considered important that this Council be pro-active in seeking lasting protection of such areas ahead of time.

With purchase there will be no immediate need for restoration work, however the springs need to be fenced off from stock and the land will continue to be grazed in the medium term to manage the site. This will return revenue to the Council and the cost of maintaining the land will therefore be profitable.

PROPERTY DETAILS

The property contains 4.1325ha located on the southern side of Quaifes Road almost opposite Murphys Road and lies to the west of the property previously acquired by the Council. Situated on the property is a modest lightly constructed house having a floor area of 115.48m² which was initially erected as a temporary residence and which the owners wish to replace.

The property is well developed and subdivided into five paddocks, central entrance driveway and lane arrangement, the house site area and a rear woodlot in the South-Eastern corner. The block has pasture cover with extensive planting established with major shelter belts running along part of the southern boundary together with the accessway. The block supports a number of natural springs with a creek dissecting the rear of the property which is fed by three springs with a further spring being located to the South East.

Following discussions with the owner he has agreed to dispose of the Southern portion of the block (shown as Section 1 on the attached plan SM 1243-01) subject to their obtaining Building Consent to erect their new home on the balance area. Advice has now been received that this has been obtained and as such the owner is seeking confirmation of the Council's intention to acquire the property.

Negotiations with the owner have now been completed on the terms and conditions contained in the public excluded section of this report.

SOURCE OF FUNDS

Funds are available in the 2004/05 Waterways and Wetlands Capital Programme for land purchase in Halswell. With a combination of the existing house on the site and the grazing land available it is estimated that the land will return approximately \$300 per week. Funds for this purchase have been moved from the Marshlands area as a substantial commitment has already been made to the Aidanfield purchase and the proposed purchase in Marshlands has yet to be successfully negotiated.

Staff

Recommendation: That the Council approve the purchase of Section 1 on the attached plan SM1243-01 as a Local Purpose (Wetlands) Reserve on the terms and conditions contained in the public excluded section of this report.

Chairman's

Recommendation:

1. That the above recommendation be adopted.
2. That copies of the reports be made available to the Regulatory and Consents Committee and the Urban Planning and Growth Special Committee for information.