

8. RIVERSIDE PLANTING SITES: CITY-WIDE REVIEW

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The purpose of this report is to inform the committee of the results of the review and to recommend appropriate follow-up action, in response to the main points raised.

BACKGROUND

Following a deputation from the Merivale Precinct Society to the Parks Gardens and Waterways Committee meeting 11 February 2004, expressing concerns about the effects of native planting along the banks of the Avon River adjacent to Little Hagley Park, the committee resolved that the following process be followed to progress this issue.

- Each Community Board be requested to select 2 key areas in their community for a review of riverside planting
 - The areas selected be assessed by Jenny Moore, independent landscape consultant
 - The criteria for assessment acknowledge the issues raised by the submitters
 - Community Boards be given an opportunity to comment on the respective assessments prior to consideration by the Parks, Gardens and Waterways Committee
 - Appropriate guidelines be prepared for future plantings.
(all of these steps have been completed to date, except for the last bullet point)
2. That staff develop a long-term plan for riverside planting and that the Community Boards be involved with the identification of areas within their communities to be included in the long-term plan *(this will be progressed in 2005)*.

REPORT BACK ON REVIEW FINDINGS

Site: Avon River – south side from Helmores Lane Bridge to Carlton Mill Bridge

This is the site which the Merivale Precinct Society initially approached the committee about and it was one of 2 sites examined in the community board report to the Hagley/Ferrymead Board.

The particular matters raised for consideration in the review included:

- *Access to the water's edge*
- *Safety for pedestrians using the area*
- *Preservation of attractive views*
- *Appropriate siting of seats*
- *Appropriate maintenance practices*
- *Density, shading or intrusion upon other significant vegetation*

The Board asked that the heritage values of site 1 also be considered.

REVIEW PROCESS

The review was carried out by Jenny Moore, ANZILA. Jenny carried out a site analysis, including river character, vegetation character and site character. She then proceeded to explore opportunities to mitigate, through design and maintenance, any detracting outcomes of the planting. The report includes photographs of the plantings, with notations.

Each Community Board received a report specific to its own area, and a copy of the report presented to the Hagley/Ferrymead Community Board (which includes the Little Hagley Park plantings) is attached. Reports to the other Community Boards are available to committee members upon request.

KEY FINDINGS

Some key statements from the report include:

“This collection of species forms the major combination of plants that have been planted randomly along this bank. Little consideration has been given to strategic view points, especially where seats are located, or where the bank gradient is shallow and access to the water’s edge is feasible.”

“In some instances, plants that have the potential to grow into tall trees have been planted very close to mature oaks. The perception is that the oaks should be removed to make way for the developing native planting.”

“The maturing native vegetation is developing into a dense band along the riverbank, blocking out views of the water and limiting access to the water, where the riverbank is at its shallowest gradient.”

“This loss of lateral light to the footpath from dense, tall riparian vegetation when the oak trees are in leaf changes the character and experience for pedestrians using this path. The shadiness of the path is accentuated as the evergreen native vegetation meets the tree canopy therefore blocking out lateral light.”

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions are stated in **3.0 Opportunities for mitigation through design and maintenance**.

- 3.1 The presence of native vegetation along the river bank should not be seen as a negative situation. From Harper Avenue the existence of the river is only discernible at a few points, where the road crosses it and where the river and road come together. The native vegetation provides a visual indication that the river exists, especially when it is hidden below steep banks.
- 3.2 Design plays an important part in riverbank restoration and there are many factors that need to be considered, such as:
 - Size and location of plants
 - Growth rate and form of plants for the site
 - Maintenance and management of plants to respond to plant growth, e.g. thinning, pruning, shaping, replacements
 - Response to river profile, providing access to the water’s edge
 - Maintain vistas and frame views
 - Site character and that of surrounding areas

HAGLEY/FERRYMEAD BOARD REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the information be received.
2. That remedial work be carried out as recommended in the report.
3. That the report conclusions be shared with all designers who have an input into riverside planting projects in Christchurch, in order to design more appropriately for future plantings.
4. That riverside planting is maintained in such a way that the detractions outlined in the report are not repeated in the future.

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS ACROSS ALL SITES

Once all the reviews were done (two sites per Board) it became obvious that there were common themes coming through in the findings, and these are summarised below (Jenny Moore’s words)

"In many instances the main issues related to:

1. Lack of views and access to the watercourses
2. Planting design hasn't given much consideration to people's needs to view and access watercourses
3. Planting design doesn't respond to surrounding site character
4. Inappropriate choice of plants for certain locations, for example:
 - 4.1 Plants that have the potential to grow to a reasonable size have been planted too close to footpaths, or waterways; eventually they will overhang the path and cause problems. Cutting back causes them to assume an ugly or misshaped form.
 - 4.2 Often there has been a misunderstanding as to the form and shape that a plant will eventually assume i.e. Hebe salicifolia (Koromiko) when planted as a small plant seems appropriate as an edge or understorey plant but it will eventually grow to 2.4m and can assume the form of a small tree or spreading shrub
 - 4.3 Many designers or communities are using the 'Streamside Planting Guide' to help them make plant choices. As can be noted in the Guide diagrams, many of the edge species have the potential to grow tall and dense

This group of plant species has been used as a basic formula throughout the city and is not appropriate in areas where visual amenity of the watercourse is high and where people want to interact with the waterways.
 - 4.4 At the time of design and eventually planting, the density of planting has been high in order to achieve a good success rate. Several years later it is appropriate to remove some of these plants as the overall scheme becomes overplanted and overcrowded. This has not been happening.
 - 4.5 There is a potential resource of mature plants in some of these schemes that could be transplanted and used for other sites within the city.
5. Insufficient and lack of maintenance:
 - 5.1 Many schemes do not have individual management and maintenance plans. Most of the maintenance is carried out by separate contractors who have specific responsibility for maintaining just the watercourse or just the planting. It doesn't appear that the designer's vision for the design is conveyed to the maintenance contractors. This needs to be considered and could be achieved through a management plan or guide.
 - 5.2 Some self-seeded plants often need to be removed, particularly where they have become established in inappropriate locations i.e. close to a path where they might obscure physical and visual access, where they could affect the growth of wanted species.
6. General comments:
 - 6.1 A number of riparian plantings do not relate to the surrounding landscape character
 - 6.2 Due to the selection of plants used in riparian planting, the watercourses are becoming totally dominated by the planting. The planting becomes impenetrable and the community lose opportunities to interact with the watercourse.
 - 6.3 If inappropriate maintenance cannot be sustained on the sites that have already been planted, then it is appropriate to continue with more of these types of projects".

Staff**Recommendation:**

1. That the information be received.
2. That staff proceed to develop appropriate guidelines for future plantings and a long-term plan for riverside planting, in accordance with the February 2004 recommendations of the Parks Gardens and Waterways Committee.
3. That the guidelines come to the committee to be signed off as Policy, under the framework of the draft "Citywide Planting Strategy" once the completed strategy has been formally adopted by the Council.

Chairman's**Recommendation:**

That landscape staff of City Solutions be briefed on Jenny Moore's recommendations and these briefings take place on site.