

3. AUBURN TREE REMOVAL AND LANDSCAPE PLAN

General Manager responsible:	General Manager City Environment, DDI 941-8656
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PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. The purpose of this report is to present a summary of a tree survey carried out by a consultant Arborist in Auburn Reserve. The report contains a recommendation seeking the Board's approval to carry out a major tree removal and replacement planting programme in Auburn Reserve, which will be staged over the next 5 years.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. On 22 May 2006 a presentation was made to the Environment Committee highlighting a number of tree related issues on the park, including a presentation on the draft replanting plan. The park has a very high number of Poplar trees and the key issues on the park are generally related to one particular species and its hybrids.
3. A tree survey of all the trees on Auburn Reserve was carried out by a consultant Arborist, Karl Burgisser on behalf of the Greenspace Unit. The survey identified a number of trees that are recommended for removal and replacement. Design work on a replanting plan for the park has been completed and the Greenspace Unit proposes to carry out consultation with the local community in the near future in regard to the replanting plan.
4. Auburn Reserve is classified as a passive neighbourhood reserve of approximately 1.4 hectares. It is located off Riccarton Road and can be accessed from Riccarton Road or Auburn Avenue. A walkway bisects the reserve and is primarily a main thoroughfare for people living in the surrounding area to access Riccarton Road. Many school children use the park as a key walkway link. The use of the reserve is essentially passive recreation, with some playground equipment and a half court located at one end and at the western end of the reserve there is a building leased to radio enthusiasts.
5. Planting is generally random and around the perimeter but the size of trees creates an extensive canopy visible beyond the reserve. The entrances and central walkway have some planting to highlight the reserve amongst the built environment, but this is not a strong element and there is a general lack of theme throughout the park.
6. There are 92 trees in the reserve, made up of 18 genus being predominantly birch, poplar and ash. The larger trees over 20 metres in height are all poplar and eucalyptus. It is these which are of most concern, due to their condition and the health and safety risks posed by these trees in proximity to the public and property. As a species both poplar and eucalypt are susceptible to branch failure, particularly as they mature and in under extreme wind loading as experienced in adverse weather conditions which can frequently occur in Canterbury.
7. The majority of trees recommended for removal are the poplars. Other trees in the reserve have some maintenance issues, and some are recommended for removal as a result. The tree removals are recommended with priority and timeframe. (Refer to Tony Armstrong's memorandum of 11 May - page 2 (**Attachment 1**)).
8. The proposed removal of 26% of the existing tree population, in particular the mature species, creates an opportunity to replant and develop some of the aspects of the landscape and amenity in the reserve, Replacing a mature tree canopy cover, extending diversity in species selection and enhancing the entrances and central walkway whilst maintaining an open space with public safety, are the criteria for consideration with the landscape plan (please refer to draft landscape plan (**Attachment 2**)).

9. Council has received numerous requests from residents and contractors concerning the trees with Auburn Reserve. Many of the requests relate to health and safety issues with the trees, generally the large poplars which are planted around the perimeter of the reserve and are on the boundaries of many residential properties. Some of the incidents referred to have been damage claims, essentially for repairs to fencing as a result of falling branches in adverse weather conditions. There are numerous examples of previous failures in many of these trees as evidenced by tree wounds and clearly visible limb loss/failures. The Council has addressed these by reactive maintenance. However, this is not considered satisfactory as an ongoing management option, hence a recommendation for the removal of many of the trees.
10. Historically these trees have been a misused "Landscape Tool" and were never intended to be a mature climax species for the park. Their primary use in a landscape function is to provide a fast established look to an area in a short space of time while the more desirable and long term species are establishing. Unfortunately they were not removed at the appropriate time.
11. A draft landscape plan has been developed to help mitigate for any tree removal. The community will be invited to comment on the landscape plan as part of the consultation process.

FINANCIAL AND LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

12. The funding for the removal and replanting of the trees will be accommodated within 2006/07, 2007/08, 2008/09 and 2010/11 Capex and Opex programme for the Greenspace Unit. The vast majority of tree removals will be completed within the 2006/07-2007/08 financial years. Replanting will commence in the 2006/07 financial year and be progressively implemented as trees are removed. All tree removal and replanting will be completed within 3 years.
13. The staged tree removal programme is primarily an operational matter for the Greenspace Unit to undertake, being a combination of good arboricultural management practices, liability and risk management considerations as well as the Council's wider health and safety obligations. Many of the trees are located near "high target" zones such as play areas, sports facilities and pedestrian pathways and private properties.
14. The Council would be exposed to a high risk from future liability/negligence and insurance claims for any personal or property damage if we took no action in regard to managing the issues around these trees, especially given our knowledge of their condition. There will be no consultation regarding the tree removals as Council does not consult around issues of health and safety, however, as a matter of courtesy the local community will be informed of any tree removals and the reasons why. The community will be consulted in regard to the replacement planting proposal detailed in the draft landscape plan.
15. The trees are not listed as protected under the City Plan and no resource consents are required for this work.
16. Health & safety, risk management, liability and insurance concerns exist if the tree work is deferred. This is particularly relevant given that we have an independent report that identifies safety concerns with a number of these trees.
17. All work will be carried out by a Council approved contractor with the appropriate health and safety and work site management controls in place.

OPTIONS

18. There are three possible options:

- (a) Status quo.

This is not considered a viable option, as it would leave the Council highly exposed to a negligence claim in relation to any subsequent damage to persons or property given staff awareness of the condition of the trees.

- (b) Increase level of regular maintenance and implement a regular safety monitoring programme.

This option will not address the key issues in the long term and has the effect of simply deferring the cost of the ultimate action to some point in the future. The overall maintenance cost would be significantly increased with this option and there is still the risk of potential failure of some of these trees given their size, location and the susceptibility characteristics of this particular poplar species.

- (c) Undertake a staged tree removal and replacement planting programme.

This option will address the immediate risk management/health and safety issues that are currently present on this park. Appropriate species selection and placement will reduce the overall tree maintenance costs for the park in the longer term by ensuring that these issues do not recur in the future.

PREFERRED OPTION

19. The preferred option is option (c). Under this option the proposed course of action would be as follows:

- (a) Removal of six Poplar trees and one gum tree over the 2006/07 period. These trees are the highest priority at this stage in terms of their size, location and susceptibility to future failures
- (b) Removal of five Poplar and one ash over the 2006/07 period.
- (c) Removal of the remaining five Poplar and six various species in the 2006/07/08 period
- (d) The Greenspace Unit will carry out consultation with the local community in regards to the replacement planting programme for the park. The replacement planting will be undertaken progressively over the next three financial years commencing in the 2006/07 financial year.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Board approve option (c) as outlined in the section headed "Preferred Option".