

4. DARROCH RESERVE - FENCING

General Manager responsible:	General Manager City Environment
Officer responsible:	Transport and Greenspace Manager
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PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. The purpose of this report is to seek the Board's approval to install post and cable fencing with associated plantings and open access points on the front and rear boundaries of Darroch Reserve, following community consultation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. The Darroch Reserve/Otukaikino Wetland Area Plan was approved by the Shirley/Papanui Community Board in November 2005. This included the installation of a playground in Darroch Reserve in 2005/06 and a staged development of the Otukaikino wetland, located over the stop bank from the playground. The playground development included a low post and cable fence across the Rushmore Drive frontage, which is yet to be installed.
3. In June 2006 the Transport and Greenspace Unit received a petition from the residents of Rushmore Drive and surrounding areas, signed by 122 residents. The petition seeks action in relation to a number of issues in Darroch Reserve/Otukaikino Wetland, including a request for security fencing of the front and rear boundaries of Darroch Reserve, with two access gates at each boundary, creating a park that is closed in on all four boundaries and has restricted access via gates. The intended purpose of this requested fencing is to enhance safety for vulnerable users of the playground.
4. Council officers have advised the residents that post and cable fencing and associated plantings would be installed on the front and rear boundaries of the reserve to provide a clear delineation of the park's boundaries. This solution is not acceptable to the petitioner, who seeks security fencing, which he considers is necessary to cater for the toddlers and people with disabilities that use this park. Staff have therefore reassessed the fencing needs of the reserve in terms of the special needs of this community.
5. Darroch Reserve has two types of vulnerable users: those in wheelchairs (7 wheelchair users within 200m of the park) and a large number of toddlers (27 under 3 years old) - some of which have unpredictable behaviour.
6. The feedback from these users is that wheelchair access is essential, as the park is well used by local residents in wheelchairs. These users noted that the proposed low post and cable fencing with openings without gates would be ideal. Some of the residents that have toddlers that 'bolt' agreed that low fencing enhanced with plantings will provide an effective barrier to toddlers in the park, despite the fact that the access-ways will not be gated. This was considered to be adequate as the caregiver's attention could be focussed on small areas where there are breaks in the fence.
7. It is the view of Council staff that the installation of security fencing could create a false sense of security within the park and lead to the risk of children being left in the park unsupervised. Staff recommend the installation of low post and cable fencing with associated plantings and open access points on the front and rear boundaries of the reserve to clearly define the park's boundaries. As this solution is not accepted by the petitioner, Community Board approval to proceed with post and cable fencing is sought.

FINANCIAL AND LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

8. There is funding in the 2006/07 Capital Works Programme of \$3,000 to fence and landscape the front and rear boundaries of Darroch Reserve.
9. The cost of installing post and cable fencing with associated plantings on the front and rear boundaries of Darroch Reserve is approximately \$3,000.

10. The cost of providing 1.2m high mesh fence with two gates on each of the boundaries of Darroch Reserve is approximately \$9,000. The Transport and Greenspace Unit's Parks and Cemeteries Asset Management Plan, which manages the park's assets, is silent on this level of service. Policy does not exist to fence the frontage of parks. Normal Council practice is for a low post and rail or post and cable fence. All fences are installed to Parks Unit standards and are of a low profile and visually unobtrusive.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

That the Shirley/Papanui Community Board approves the installation of post and cable fencing with associated plantings and open access points on the front and rear boundaries of Darroch Reserve.

CHAIRPERSON'S RECOMMENDATION

That the staff recommendation be adopted.

BACKGROUND ON DARROCH RESERVE FENCING

11. Darroch Reserve is located in north-west Belfast, allocated to Council as the reserve contribution from the surrounding sub-division of Rushmore Drive, Riegler Place, Greenmeadow Gardens and Langley Place. Darroch Reserve backs onto part of the Otukaikino Wetland that extends through to the Groyne. The two reserves are separated by an Environment Canterbury secondary stopbank.
12. The subdivision surrounding Darroch Reserve is geographically isolated in terms of access to playgrounds. In 2004 a local residents' group contacted Council staff proposing that Darroch Reserve could be developed as a playground. The group submitted this request to the Annual Plan with a petition of 81 signatures.
13. The Greenspace Unit had funding in the 2005/2006 financial year for riparian development on the Otukaikino River and a new playground development at Darroch Reserve. A draft concept plan was prepared in June 2005 and distributed to the local community for comment. There was strong support for the plan, with some amendments being sought. These included a request that the playground area to be fully fenced (with access gates) and a request that there be a fence with a toddler/child proof lock between the playground and the wetland.
14. A report was presented to the Community Board in November 2005 recommending that, in terms of the fencing, a post and cable fence should be installed across the road frontage of Darroch Reserve to restrict both vehicle access and children running onto Rushmore Drive. This report was approved by the Board.
15. In June 2006 the Transport and Greenspace Unit received a petition from the residents of Rushmore Drive and surrounding areas, which seeks action in relation to a number of issues in Darroch Reserve/Otukaikino Wetland. This included a request for security fencing of the front and rear boundaries of Darroch Reserve, with two access gates at each boundary, creating a park that is closed in on all four boundaries and has restricted access via gates. The intended purpose of this fencing is to improve safety for park users.

Fencing of the Darroch Reserve Road Boundary

16. The community's petition raised concerns about the volume and speed of traffic on Rushmore Drive and the potential danger that this poses to young children that use the park. Subsequent discussions with the petitioner revealed additional concerns that, as this community has a large number of physically and intellectually disabled residents, there is a need for security fencing that would prevent vulnerable park users leaving the park unless accompanied by caregiver.
17. The petition also sought that speed bumps be installed on Rushmore Drive. Rushmore Drive is a local road cul-de-sac with relatively low traffic volumes and, while there is a planned subdivision of 26 homes in this area, the expected traffic volumes are not high. Council staff have investigated the request for speed humps and determined that Rushmore Drive does not meet the criteria for traffic calming. However, Council will install signage that alerts drivers to the fact that there may be children in this location. This solution has been well received by local residents. Staff have been advised by residents that the speed issue is attributable to one or two neighbours that live locally. These people have not been responsive to requests to slow down. Community members have been advised to discuss this issue with the local Community Constable.
18. Staff have reconsidered the type of fencing that is required on the road frontage, discussed the petitioner's concerns and contacted the disabled users that have been identified. Darroch Reserve has two types of vulnerable users: those in wheelchairs (7 wheelchair users within 200m of the park) and a large number of toddlers (27 under 3 years old) - some of which have unpredictable behaviour.
19. The feedback from these users is that wheelchair access is essential, the park is well used by local residents in wheelchairs. The recently installed pathways have catered for this and are much appreciated by the park's wheelchair users. These residents noted that the proposed post and cable fencing would be ideal as it provides openings without gates. Some members of the community that have toddlers that 'bolt' agreed that low fencing enhanced with planting will provide an effective barrier to toddlers in the park, despite the fact that the access-ways will not be gated. The reason given was that this would be adequate as the caregiver's attention could be focussed on small areas where there are breaks in the fence. This solution is not accepted

by the petitioner, who would like to see security fencing with access controlled by gates. However, it should be noted that a number of the signatories accept that a low fence without gates would be preferred.

20. Low post and cable fencing is consistent with the fencing solutions adopted in other reserves in the city that are on local roads. Most local parks have no fence or a low barrier on the street frontage and the decision to install a security fence is usually made in a situation where the park is adjacent to a major arterial route or significant feeder road.
21. In response to the community's concern about the risk of toddlers bolting onto Rushmore Drive, staff propose to enhance the proposed post and cable fencing with additional planting that allows for a 3 metre wide gap for maintenance vehicles. This will provide a visual barrier to toddlers and clearly define the park environment from the road environment. The access points will remain open and have a minimal access width of 1.2 metres that is obstacle free, in accordance with the Parks and Waterways Access Policy (April 2002).

Fencing of the Darroch Reserve's Rear Boundary (adjacent to Stop Bank)

22. The community's petition raised concerns about the potential hazards of the Otukaikino Wetland, located on the other side of the stopbank from the playground. Concerns relate to the concealment of the wetland and its potential to provide a drowning hazard for young children.
23. The Darroch Reserve/Otukaikino Wetland Area Plan (attached) include linkages from Darroch Reserve to footpaths and boardwalks around the wetland that may ultimately be connected to the Waimairi Walkway. Work on the wetland is ongoing, with the issue of the concealment of the wetland be initially dealt with by the installation of a sign that warns of a concealed waterway and, more recently, by the clearing of vegetation around the waterway.
24. The approved Area Plan did not include fencing at the rear boundary of Darroch Reserve as staff considered that the stopbank was a sufficient boundary to the Darroch Reserve playground. The petition seeks for this rear boundary to be fully fenced with access gates.
25. Staff have reconsidered the type of fencing that is required on the rear boundary of the reserve. In response to community concern about the perceived risk of children running from the playground, over the stopbank and into the wetland, we propose to erect a low post and cable fence, with plantings and open access points to link with pathways. Rather than providing a substantial barrier to the wilderness area on the other side of the stopbank, it is important to make people aware of the potential hazards and allow them to manage such hazards appropriately. This fencing, in combination with the existing signage and ongoing maintenance of the vegetation around the wetland, will ensure that park users are aware of the potential water hazard on the other side of the stopbank.

OPTIONS

26. Two options were considered for the fencing of Darroch Reserve:
 - (a) Post and cable fencing and plantings with open access points. Funding is available for this fencing option, which is consistent with fencing solutions throughout the city. It is wheelchair accessible, provides a good definition of park boundaries and allows ongoing integration of the park with adjacent wetland and walkways.
 - (b) Security fencing with gates. This option is inconsistent with the level of service provided to other local parks and no funding is available for this option. Not consistent with access policy and not wheelchair accessible. This type of fencing may provide false sense of security in park, which will always have an element of risk and require supervision of vulnerable users. It may also provide opportunity for bullying in the park. This option would be more visually obtrusive.

PREFERRED OPTION

27. The preferred option is (a), low post and cable fencing and plantings with open access points.