

11. RIVERSIDE PLANTING SITES: CITY-WIDE REVIEW

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PROPOSAL/PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to:

- (a) inform the Council of the results of the reviews carried out on two sites of riverside planting selected by each community board and;
- (b) seek Council approval for staff to proceed with guidelines to set design parameters for future plantings, which take into account the matters raised in the consultant's review reports.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past 10 years, a combination of subtle bankworks and associated planting have been used to strengthen and enhance stretches of the banks of both man-made and natural watercourses running throughout the city. The first experimental planting took place at Corsers Stream, at the New Brighton Road end, in the early 1990s. In spite of initial misgivings from developers who were subdividing land on both sides of the stream, there was enthusiastic acceptance by land purchasers of the benefits of the natural stream appearance in a residential setting. Stage One was quickly followed by subsequent stages until the whole of Corsers Stream from New Brighton Road to Travis Road was treated in this manner. This saved laying expensive stormwater pipes and added other values to the management of surface water disposal.

Similar plantings have been carried out in many locations throughout the city and the Council has adopted the '6 values' approach to surface water management through its acceptance of the Waterways and Wetlands Natural Asset Management Strategy 1999. In 2003, the Waterways Wetlands and Drainage Guide was completed and this document will eventually form a design guide for staff as part of the Christchurch City Council Code of Urban Practice. This code has not yet been adopted formally.

Following a deputation from the Merivale Precinct Society to the Parks Gardens and Waterways Committee meeting of 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.

- "1.
 - *Each Community Board be requested to select two 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."*

The Review

The review of sites chosen by the Community Boards 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.

(A spreadsheet is attached (Attachment A) which summarises the decisions made by all the community boards, except the Hagley/Ferrymead Board, which met yesterday and whose recommendations are tabled.)

Key Review Findings

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 ie Hebe salicifolia (Koromiko) when planted as a small plant seems appropriate as an edge or understory 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 diagram's, 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 over-planted 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 ie close to a path where they might obscure physical and visual access, or 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 appropriate maintenance cannot be sustained on the sites that have already been planted, then it is inappropriate to continue with more of these types of projects."*

STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Council:

- (a) Adopt the "Riverside Planting Sites: City-wide Review" report.
- (b) Approve the drafting of design guidelines for riparian planting along the city's waterways, which address the issues raised in the report.

OPTIONS

1. **Status Quo:** It is clear from the review that the current planting and maintenance practices are resulting in some detrimental outcomes. To leave the matter unaddressed will only cause repeats of these outcomes and result in more complaints from the public. It will also give riparian planting a bad name and this would be a pity, given the many values it adds to the city's beauty and biodiversity
2. **Modified Planting Practice:** It would not take much effort to put together planting guidelines which all parties follow when carrying out planting along the city's waterways. This would include planting done by volunteer groups and special interest groups, who would need to be made aware of the guidelines and be supervised in their carrying out of planting.

Views of the Community

There are views for and against the planting of native species along the banks of the city's waterway but the main issue hinges on appropriateness to the particular site.

PREFERRED OPTION AND PROPOSAL

The Citywide Planting Strategy sets a framework at the highest strategic level but it does not go into the level of detail that is required when carrying out site specific riparian planting. Option 2 (modified planting practice) is the preferred option which would lead to the drafting of detailed design guidelines for riparian planting in the future. These guidelines can set the standard required and, if accepted by Council, they will automatically be used by those designing and planting the city's waterways. They would set out clear expectations of desired outcomes and would be a measure of whether the plantings do in fact meet agreed requirements. They have the added benefit of assisting maintenance in the future and thereby creating savings.