

Note: all fields marked with *are required:

I wish to talk to the main points in my written submission at the hearings

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Parks and Open Spaces. Page 51

Introduction. I am Eugene D Mc Neill and have lived twenty-eight years in Bowenvale Avenue. I take an interest in our city and have made submissions and/ or attended consultation meetings in response to requests by the Christchurch Council on several matters e.g. The South Library Centre (two meetings), City Draft Plans (with written submissions and attendance), Bowenvale Park (Heathcote County Council), Vernon Park and others.

I have taken an active part in the plantings of the Ansley Terrace area, Dry Bush, the dunes of New Brighton and others though not Little Hagley Park.

Without a doubt Christchurch is a beautiful city with its gardens, reserves, parks and much credit goes to the Parks and Waterway's staff and numerous voluntary organisations. A reading of the Draft Plan and the Council's website that the Council is placing a strong emphasis on native plantings. However, though this may be the stated policy of the Council there are folk within and without who unfortunately have another agenda.

My attention was drawn to the other agenda by a letter in *The Press* by John W. Jameson (November 20). under the title of *City Image* (Appendix 1) to which I responded. Of eight replies that follow only one was against my stance. Upon my investigation I found that the Merivale Precinct Society was asking the City Council to remove native trees and vegetation from Little Hagley Park.

Worse still, with further investigation I found that there were two coteries, one within the Council Waterways and Parks Department, the other among the Councillors supporting the same. This is disturbing. Not only disturbing in their philosophy and actions, but also in the secrecy in which it is being done

Case 1. Here is an example of what the activities of the coterie has lead to.

A recommendation from the Parks and Waterways has been forwarded to the Council to improve Heathcote Valley Park. A plan was drawn up by a consultant. His basic concept, though foreign, is reasonable, but all plantings are to be exotic, not a single native plant! Excuse? It has a suitable micro-climate for them, that is exotics. So what! It is an ideal area for a wide range of natives including those that are colourful and which will require less maintenance than exotics and at the same time provide shelter and shade. Just to name a few the kowhai, the native fuchsias, pittosporums. If the consultant is a 'professional' then he would have taken into account the wider issue of using natives to encourage native birds to the area. He would also have taken into account that the area is surrounded with the hills which are covered with native vegetation so he should made his plan to fit with the surrounding environment. For God's sake, this is the quintessence of New Zealand and he recommends 'mass planting of Proteas and Leucadendrous at either end of the embankment to provide colour and interest to those sunny, exposed areas'.

Why was a 'professional' consultant employed at all, especially one who obviously has no empathy for New Zealand flora. I am not sure whether the consultant is at fault, or whether one of the coterie on the staff who prepared his brief. If it is the consultant I would call into question his qualifications. If someone on the staff then he should be fired for gross incompetence. The question arises are there no qualified staff within the Parks to do the job. At a projected cost \$30,000. surely this should have been an in-house project.

Case 2.

Returning to the Little Hagley Park example. Over a period of one or two decades many, many volunteers have spent untold hours planting native vegetation along the banks of the river. Late last year the Merivale Precinct Society, whose integrity I severely question, (See appendix 2.) made approaches to the Council stating that they wanted the banks of the river passing Little Hagley Park to be returned to their former 'pristine' state i.e. an English setting of 'nicely moved lawns'. (*City Image*. See Appendix 3). However, the word pristine means the original state, i.e. as river banks were in the time of say, the Deans, which I am sure was not their intention. They based their premise on an archaic myth that Christchurch, is, or was an English town. Christchurch has been no more like an English town than a piece of bacon is to a fried egg. Our native flora is indigenous, part and parcel of our heritage. We have grown away from the colonial stage e.g. I am a fourth generation New Zealander and my roots are here not overseas. Furthermore, there is no reason why the two types of vegetation in Little Hagley Park cannot exist side by side as they do now in a harmonious whole.

The reasons given by Merivale Precinct Society are specious, that the natives were making the river bank a stranger danger area, that the water cannot be seen, loss of the English setting, rats and so on.

For example, take their reason that the riverbank is unsafe. This is absolutely false for it is very open area. This 'stranger danger' has been around for years. A few years ago two murders, one in the Auckland Domain in broad daylight and in the open grassed area at the rear of the Auckland Museum and the other in a similar situation in a different part of Auckland were followed by investigations into what constituted 'safe environments'. It was pointed out that open areas, (the green areas and mature exotic trees in Hagley Park, for example, are more prone than any sheltered areas such as Little Hagley Park has to offer. There are at least been two English studies, which come up with the same conclusion.

That the water cannot be seen. Absolute rubbish. I have very recently visited the park and there a plenty of beautiful, pretty little vistas framed by the natives.

What concerns me is that had the Head of the Parks Unit been on the ball he could have sent a staff member to see what Merivale Precinct Society were wanting and then sending them a letter pointing out that planting of native vegetation in this area was consistent with Council's policy drawn up by negotiations in the 1990's with interested parties and the nearby communities. Instead the Council has spent thousands of dollars having sent staff, two parties of councillors to make an inspection, two special meetings of Community boards and waste of valued time of interested ratepayers.

Conclusions. A recent Council survey showed that c85% (2003?) of the citizens were satisfied, or very satisfied with the present Council's policy that the citizens approve and want *more native habitat* in their neighbourhoods.

Though I have been arguing for indigenous plants let us not forget that it is the kowhai, the pittisporums, and other natives that bring the native birds not the English oaks, the European sycamores, the elms, or other exotics. We as citizens have a duty to ensure that there are native areas to support our native birds and wild life and to keep these for our grandchildren. We are, as the Maoris would say, only the guardians not the owners of our environment and therefore it is our duty now to save our heritage and encourage native plantings for generations to come.

I might remind the Council that under recent legislation, the Local Government Amendment Bill it has a responsibility for the protection of biodiversity and this includes the protection of native flora and fauna.

I suggest that there be much closer contact with local communities and organisations such as Canterbury Botanical Society, Forest and Bird Society, local high schools, and citizens. There was a call for consultations in the case of the Heathcote Valley Park but it must have been restricted to the Heathcote Valley area though the park will serve a wider community.

An excellent example of the benefits of community consultation is the manner in which the council had discussions with the local people about the South Centre and Library. The traffic unit also conducted some very useful public consultations

Finally, I strongly applaud the emphasis that is being given to the protection of native flora, and by inference fauna, in the Draft Plan, but in practice we must guard ourselves from reactionaries.

Eugene D Mc Neill
5th May 2004.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1. *CITY IMAGE*

City Image

Sir-I am appalled with John W. Jameson's letter (November 20).

My Oxford dictionary says that pristine is characteristic of early times, unspoiled, or unmodified by modern tendencies. From the Dean's arrival until the late 1940's much of Christchurch had natural cover of pristine native vegetation.

Our visitors from the North Island and overseas extol the imaginative work of the parks and waterways departments using native vegetation English Park, Brougham Street, the many waterways reserves and elsewhere where there is a great interesting variety of form, colour, texture and better still they are part and parcel of our heritage.

I am a fourth generation New Zealander. I am proud of our country and far from being embarrassed in showing our city to visitors I get a positive great feeling from the positive comments they make.

Eugene D Mc Neill
Bowenvale.
22nd November 2003.

APPENDIX 2. **Merivale Precinct Society.**

Message sent to the Ferrymeade/Heathcote Community Board for their 14th December 2003 special meeting, re Little Hagley Park.

Question. Is this to accommodate Merivale Precinct Society? If so, I have grave doubts about their integrity and veracity as the following illustrate.

A few years back when the Council called for submissions to the Draft Plan Society wanted:

1. 'Last submission for the day and 2. Their submission to be heard 'in committee',

2. They called a meeting of all ratepayer societies of Christchurch on a Saturday afternoon. It was poorly attended with only the eleven Merivale Society members and myself present. The reporter who had been arranged to attend left because he felt he was “conned”, to use his expression. The chairman submitted a report to one of the community papers, which was published in glowing terms despite factually incorrect.

3. I attend another of their meetings where the agenda was for a specific agenda, but in fact it was for the privatisation of South Power. It was an arranged or stacked meeting. The next morning the chairman made on commercial radio station a longish statement stating what a good and profitable meeting it was. By accident I heard it and refuted it. Several folk rang the station and strongly supported me.

I subsequently found that the Merivale Precinct Society did NOT represent ALL the ratepayers of Merivale and/or surroundings as they claimed.

End

Eugene D McNeill.