

**3. THOMSON PARK -
REMOVAL OF CONIFERS AND REPLACEMENT PLANTING**

RR 7922

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Corporate Plan Output: Park woodlot replacement. Parks Plans & Policy Statements	

The purpose of this report is to gain approval from the Committee to remove the pines and macrocarpas from the northern and eastern perimeters of Thomson Park (Marine Parade), and to begin implementing the proposed landscape plan.

INTRODUCTION

The Council has received a request from the North New Brighton Residents Association for the removal of the pines and macrocarpas in the vicinity of the children’s playground at Thomson Park. The main reason for the request is the conifers cast a dense shade over the playground, particularly during the winter months, making it cold, dark and generally uninviting.

The trees in question currently exist along the Marine Parade (eastern) boundary and behind the Bowhill Road shops (northern boundary). They are thought to be about 60 years old and over mature, prone to branch breakage and are therefore potentially unsafe. They are of decreasing value as a windbreak and landscape feature due to the extent of lower branch die back.

PROPOSED TREE REMOVAL

It is considered preferable to remove all the pines along the eastern and northern boundaries in one operation rather than thin their numbers and try to establish new plantings in between. New plantings do not thrive well when planted in the vicinity of old conifers, because of competition for nutrients, soil moisture and light. The difficulty in establishing the new plantings adjacent to the trees further south along the park boundary is evidence of this.

Another consideration is the damage that will be caused to established plantings if the old trees have to be felled at a later date.

There are sufficient funds in the 1998/99 budget to provide for the removal of the conifers and replacement planting.

The line of pines to the west of the play area will be retained.

THOMSON PARK LANDSCAPE PLAN

The Parks Unit has commissioned Tony Milne, Landscape Architect, to prepare a landscape plan for Thomson Park. The plan considers the entire layout and amenity of the park and can be used as a management tool for future enhancement of the park as funds become available. Recent work includes installation of irrigation and relocation of lighting to increase sports use on the southern portion.

The existing skating area is likely to soon be upgraded following consultation with skaters as to how the Council can best upgrade the facility.

PROPOSED REPLACEMENT PLANTING

The landscape plan also includes proposals for planting once the pines and macrocarpas are removed from along the eastern boundary. It is proposed that a mixture of native trees and shrubs will form a strong, indigenous theme along Marine Parade reflecting recent Coast Care plantings across the road. The layout of the planting has been designed to allow views and access into the park and at the same time creating an undulating, planted edge to the park, rather than a hard, straight edge that the conifers currently create. The softer edge that will develop with the new planting is more in line with planting across Marine Parade and is indicative of the dune system, which would have once been evident in the park.

A report was presented to the Burwood/Pegasus Community Board on this issue in July 1998. The Board resolved to recommend to the Committee that the pines and macrocarpas along the northern and eastern boundaries of Thompson Park be removed early in the 1998/99 financial year, once public comment had been sought, and that replacement planting occur soon after the conifers are removed according to the landscape plan.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Since July 1998, extensive advertising of this proposal has occurred including a landscape plan displayed in the park, articles in community newspapers (one of which is circulated over the whole eastern area of the city) and articles in residents' association newsletters. A public information leaflet was distributed over an extensive area around the park (further than that normally undertaken) in February this year.

A public meeting was held at the North New Brighton War Memorial community Centre on Wednesday 17 March and the comments from those present are attached. This meeting was chaired by Chrissie Williams and was attended by the Arboriculturist, the Area Parks Officer and the Landscape Architect, as well as Community Board members, including Councillors.

Whereas the majority of those present at the meeting were in favour of the proposal, some opposition was voiced and has since been voiced on site, in The Press and on the internet.

The objectors claim that the trees give shelter from the easterly winds and harmful sunshine. There was also comment that the consultation was inadequate, slanted and poorly advertised.

The trees, being mainly on the east, shade the park in the cooler mornings when the UV rays are of less concern, the main protection being required from 11.00am – 3.00pm. More sun in the morning will warm the area and dry it out from previous rain and dew. There will be more shelter from the easterly winds once the new plantings are established. The previous comments in this report have outlined the consultation which was undertaken, and the area covered.

Recent photographs supplied by local residents are displayed for Councillors' information.

TREE ASSESSMENT

One of the main ideas voiced at the public meeting was that some of the trees (in groups) could be left to maintain at least some of the landscape feature that these trees are. Assessments of the whole plantation, groups and individual trees have taken place over the years, latterly at more frequent intervals as they have been of concern, but another was undertaken on Monday 22 March.

The Arboriculturist reports: “The Pine and Macrocarpa trees are considered to be mature and approaching the end of their useful life. This is evident by the number of large limbs and whole trees that have failed over the past years.

Most recently one Macrocarpa which failed mid March 1999 and another which was ‘hung-up’ in neighbouring trees along with a co-dominant pine which lost its secondary leader – dropping onto a seat and into the children’s play area on or about Saturday 27 February 1999.

Reports have also been received from neighbours on Bowhill Road of large branches failing and landing inside their properties over recent months. As the trees have grown as a group, individual assessment is still dependent on surrounding trees.

The majority of trees have one or more major structural defects in the manner of co-dominant stems, poor branch attachment, signs of decay and/or excessive weight. These factors, combined with the effects of wind throw once other trees were removed, would create too great a hazard if some trees were to remain.”

CONCLUSION

The removal of the conifers from Thomson Park will encourage better use of the park’s facilities, and provides an opportunity to improve the park’s amenity along Marine Parade and addresses health and safety issues.

These health and safety issues are the crux of the matter. Once residents’ concerns were raised and supported by recent incidents of trees falling with no warning, the issue becomes one of public safety.

Parks’ staff readily agree that the trees have a major impact on the local landscape, being a significant landmark, able to be seen for kilometres. We too would like to save the trees but this is not horticulturally possible. Even huge expense by cabling and bracing would not ensure that once one tree in a group or line goes that the others will not drop in a domino effect.

Recommendation: That the pines and macrocarpas along the northern and eastern boundaries of Thomson Park be removed and replacement planting be undertaken according to the landscape plan.

The above report was considered by the Burwood/Pegasus Community Board at its meeting on 29 March 1999. Mrs Sarah Beaven was in attendance at the meeting to outline the concerns of a number of New Brighton residents about the consultation measures undertaken by the Council over the tree removal at Thomson Park. Ms Beaven understood that trees should be removed for safety reasons. However she felt the community was generally not in favour of the blanket removal of all trees. She also felt that many people did not know of the

public meeting, nor had even heard of Community Boards, and were generally nervous about approaching the local government system.

The Board therefore decided to recommend to the Parks and Recreation Committee:

1. That the removal of trees in Thomson Park be delayed until further consultation has taken place.
2. That the Community Advocate report to the Board on its community profile.

Chairman's

Recommendation: That the officer's recommendation be adopted.