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The purpose of this report is to assess whether Special Amenity Area (SAM) status should be sought for Fifield Terrace, from Ford Road at the north boundary, to the dead end at the south.

BACKGROUND

This report was prepared in response to a request made by the Spreydon/Heathcote Community Board for more information in regard to the suitability of Fifield Terrace for inclusion as a Special Amenity Area. Fifield Terrace was brought to the attention of the Council because of the removal of mature trees from 241 Fifield Terrace.

The Proposed City Plan identifies areas in the Living Zones of the City which have amenity and/or heritage characteristics which set them apart from the surrounding residential environment. In these areas, known as Special Amenity Areas, the City Plan rules give extra control over new development.

As a start to the assessment process, a number of the Fifield Terrace residents put forward their suggestions for the extent of the SAM, the additional controls they would like to see and signatures of residents who supported the proposal. The additional controls related to: the protection of trees and vegetation; increased building setback from the road; a reduction in the maximum building height; an increase in section size and a maximum site coverage.

In response the Environmental Policy and Planning Unit prepared an information pack which was distributed to all of the 37 households within the proposed SAM. The information pack illustrated the effect that the additional controls would have upon the residents properties. The residents were then asked to respond to the information provided and to questions regarding the character of the area.

SUMMARY OF RESIDENTS RESPONSES

Less than half of the 37 households sent the information packs responded. Of the 18 respondents, 9 were in favour of a Special Amenity Area being created and 9 respondents were against the proposal.

The majority of respondents felt that Fifield Terrace was an area of special character, largely based upon the appeal of the river setting and mature riverside trees that line it, but also due to the well-established gardens, the low density housing and stone retaining walls. Four of the respondents felt that the area has a special character but did not think that a SAM was the appropriate means of retaining this character. The respondents that did not feel that the area had a special character, were of the opinion that the area was like that of other areas of the City that have a river flowing through.

GENERAL CRITERIA FOR A SAM

The assessment of Fifield Terrace was undertaken using criteria that form the basis for existing SAMs throughout the City. The basic tests being; does the area have a coherent character and is it distinctive from the surrounding area, thereby warranting special attention through a SAM? The criteria used to assess the area are listed below:

- consistent orientation, style and age of dwellings
- continuity of setbacks and building heights
- appearance of private gardens and fences
- combination of streetscape, tree planting and maturity of on-site vegetation
- additional features such as the stone retaining walls
- a consistent degree of openness of houses to the streetscape

PLANNING ASSESSMENT

The Heathcote river setting is the most predominant feature of Fifield Terrace. The trees that line the river are mature and give the effect of lush vegetation and the peaceful nature of the area that the residents describe in their responses. Additionally the density of vegetation on private land adds to this quality. However, there is little distinction between this particular part of the river and other neighbourhoods bordering the river in this vicinity.

Vegetation

The vegetation on private property in Fifield Terrace is predominantly medium height to low growing shrubbery and plantings. A distinction must be made between the density of vegetation, and the occurrence of significant trees, of which there are few on private property in Fifield Terrace, because the protection levels afforded vegetation are dependent upon size, age and rarity.

The rule regarding vegetation suggested by the residents would have little effect on the vegetation in Fifield Terrace because of the size of most of the plantings in the area. Additionally, the type and extent of vegetation is not consistent along the street and is very like that of many other established suburbs in Christchurch, thereby not reflecting the criteria of a SAM.

However, the loss of mature trees is lamented and there is definitely a need for a more comprehensive and effective approach for the protection of trees throughout the City, to address situations such as the one experienced by the residents of Fifield Terrace.

Road Setback

The Proposed City Plan requires a 4.5 metre setback of buildings from the site boundary. Setback rules are used to promote a feeling of openness along the street, to encourage planting and to generally maintain a consistent building line. A setback rule has also been applied in SAMs, over and above that in the Proposed City Plan, where the houses are a consistent distance from the street, adding to the coherence and character of the street, or alternately where a more intimate scale is required.

At present there are three garages built within the 4.5 metre setback on Fifield Terrace and there is little consistency in, not only the distance of the houses to the road boundary, but in the orientation of buildings as well. Additionally due to the nature of the terrain along Fifield Terrace, with the elevated river terrace decreasing to river bank level, the common setback has little visual effect. If the setback were to be increased to the suggested 6 metres, six houses would be within the setback to a greater or lesser degree.

Building Coherence

In many of the existing SAMs building coherence has been used as a criteria to show a distinctive style and character that sets it apart from the surrounding area. The houses on Fifield Terrace have little coherence in terms of building style, age and orientation. The buildings have little general uniformity and there is no distinction from other neighbourhoods that can be described as typical of the area as a whole. Additionally, the difference in heights and textures of buildings gives a diversity that does not capture a characteristic style.

The height restriction in the Proposed City Plan for this area is 8 metres above ground level. The suggested height restriction of 8 metres from the road level would cut through a number of existing houses, the highest being 9.3 metres, largely due to the differences in ground level. The height of these existing buildings is not considered out of context with the residential environment.

Residential Site Density and Site Coverage

Fifield Terrace is in a Living 1 Zone. The Development Standard for section size for Living 1 Zones in the Proposed City Plan is 450m² with exceptions, including provisions for Elderly Persons Housing. The residents of Fifield Terrace have suggested 550m² as a preferred minimum site size with no special provisions.

Most sites along Fifield Terrace are very irregular in shape largely due to the influence of the river. They tend toward being narrow in street frontage with the bulk of the site not apparent from the street. Additionally the varied elevations of the sites from the street level prevent clear views to the rear of most of the sites. For these reasons increased density of development would have little visual effect on the neighbourhood from the street.

However, we acknowledge that a reduction in site sizes has the potential to affect a neighbourhood in other ways, such as a decrease in overall vegetation cover. The issue of site size, its associated adverse effects in certain areas and methods to address it, needs to be further explored

CONCLUSION

The desire of communities to retain the amenity and character of their neighbourhood is commendable and mechanisms are needed to ensure that these desires are recognised. However the choice of mechanism is important to the effectiveness in retaining that amenity. Fifield Terrace is not considered distinctive enough from the surrounding area to warrant a Special Amenity Area classification. The elements of the neighbourhood which are regarded as the most valuable aspects of the area, by the residents i.e. the river setting and trees, are in Council ownership. The vegetation in private property is unlikely to gain the protection that is sought through the introduction of a SAM because of the difficulty of achieving the retention of a general greenness rather than vegetation of a specific height, age, species etc.

A Special Amenity Area is a means of controlling new development rather than the conservation of the existing environment. It is felt that the introduction of a SAM for Fifield Terrace would limit new development in the area without sufficient justification for doing so. Other means of protecting vegetation such as City Plan rules are perhaps more appropriate and effective than a Special Amenity Area.

- Recommendation:**
1. That Fifield Terrace, from Ford Road to the southern end of Fifield Terrace, not be pursued for inclusion as a Special Amenity Area(SAM).
 2. That this report be passed to the Parks Unit for information.
 3. That other means of vegetation retention and the effects of site size, be investigated.