

Officer responsible Water Services Manager	Author Andrew Crossland and Bob Hopkins
Corporate Plan Output: Waterways and Wetlands (Vol 2 Ch 9.3)	

The purpose of this report is to advise the Board of the opportunity to replace the existing Owaka Rd Pond

Background

A plan showing the location and extent of the pond is attached. Appendix B covers the anticipated wildlife utilisation of the pond.

Owaka Road Pond is the largest and potentially most important of a cluster of shingle pits and artificial ponds located in the Halswell growth area. Other sites include Musgroves Pond, Westlake, Wigram East Retention Basin, Halswell Junction Road Retention Basin and the privately owned Oderings Ponds. Collectively these sites provide important habitat for wetland birds that otherwise would not settle in this part of Christchurch - due to the absence of natural waterbodies in this area.

Owaka Road Pond was excavated many years ago, was partly reclaimed as a landfill and then left abandoned until about 1996. Over the past two years the land-filling activity has recommenced and the pond is now being progressively filled along the northeastern side. Presently the Water Services Unit is negotiating with the owner, Envirowaste Ltd, to halt filling when approximately half the existing pond remains. In return the Water Services Unit would support a resource consent by Envirowaste to fill above ground on land immediately east of the pond (on old landfill). The City Council would then have an option to buy the landfill site and the pond for the development of a passive recreation reserve.

It should be noted that the landfill is a highly contaminated site and options for its future use are few. Development as passive reserve land and as a buffer along one side of Owaka Road Pond would seem an appropriate use.

If current discussions between the City Council and Envirowaste reach agreement, the northern half of Owaka Road Pond will be filled. A roughly oval-shaped pond with an area of approximately 1.9 ha will remain, enclosed by tall (up to 4 m), steep banks on all sides. The existing island in the northern part of the pond will disappear, as will the low shingle spit across the centre, and sheltered embayments on the northern and western sides. Up to now these features have offered important roosting, nesting and feeding opportunities for wetland birds. The loss of these features, combined with a halving of the total open water area, can be expected to greatly diminish the pond's attractiveness to birdlife. In addition, the relative impact of edge effects (particularly predators and shoreline disturbance) will increase.

CURRENT OPPORTUNITIES

Adjacent Council owned land up for disposal

A 9.6 ha parcel of land (Pt RS 4872) on the north western side of Owaka Road Pond, bounded on the north-east by the SPCA and on the south-west by Meadow Mushrooms

is owned by the Christchurch City Council and is presently up for disposal. This land occupies an old Waimakariri flood channel and still retains distinctive watercourse landscape features including a scarp and river terrace. The land presently lies undeveloped, used only for horse grazing.

The Council-owned land and the Owaka Road Pond occupy a site that was once crossed by parties of Maori moving between the upper reaches of the Heathcote river and Halswell river catchments (hence the name "Owaka" referring to the waka (canoes) that were carried overland across this site). Thus it was formerly an important link for humans moving between the districts of Lake Ellesmere (Te Waihora) and Christchurch. In the present day the site still acts as a link between these areas - no longer for people, but for migrating birds which use Owaka Road Pond as a transit point when flying between Lake Ellesmere and the Avon-Heathcote Estuary.

Given the proximity of the Council-owned land to Owaka Road Pond, the assignment of some of this land for the creation of an ecological/passive recreational reserve makes a lot of sense. Outcomes would include the recognition of a site of historical importance; the protection of distinctive natural landscape features; the enhancement of habitat for native birdlife; and the establishment of a recreational link between Homby and Halswell, passing through Warren Park, Owaka Pond, Carrs Reserve and Westlake Reserve.

Meadow Mushrooms Surplus Land

The southeastern end of the Meadow Mushrooms property, adjoining Owaka Road Pond and the Council-owned land discussed above, comprises old shingle workings (wet in winter, dry in summer) and lies surplus to the factory's requirements. Meadow Mushrooms have indicated that they are willing to sell this land to the City Council.

Potential Expansion of Owaka Road Pond

Considerable scope would appear to exist for the expansion of Owaka Road Pond westwards over Council-owned and Meadow Mushrooms-owned land.

Prior to the recent filling operation, Owaka Road Pond had an area of viz. 4.0 ha. Once filling stops this area would have been reduced to approximately 1.9 ha (= slightly less than half). Other shingle pits and ponds in the Halswell area are all relatively small, ranging from 0.9 ha (Musgroves) to 3.74 ha (Wigram East). Disturbance, edge effects and predation by domestic animals are problems at all sites. With the loss of a relatively undisturbed 4.0 ha Owaka Road Pond, this cluster of waterbodies will lack its "core" site and the carrying capacity of the whole cluster is likely to decline. Ideally what the area needs is a large pond (4-5+ ha) with a number of islands and embayments. This could be achieved by protecting the southern half of Owaka Road Pond and creating a 2+ ha extension westwards.

Recommendation: That the land surplus to requirements be set aside for wildlife reserve, the Council staff negotiate for the purchase of Meadow Mushrooms quarried land, and a new pond be created for wildlife.

Chairperson's

Recommendation: That the land surplus to requirements be set aside for wildlife reserve, the Council staff negotiate for the purchase of Meadow Mushrooms quarried land, identified in the Public Excluded section of this report and a new pond be created for wildlife.